

A MODERN  
HISTORY OF  
POLITICS &  
VIOLENCE

W. J. BERRIDGE

# CIVIL UPRISINGS IN MODERN SUDAN

The 'Khartoum Springs'  
of 1964 and 1985





# المرتضى مكتبة السودان

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## Civil Uprisings in Modern Sudan



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## Abbreviations

DUP	Democratic Unionist Party
FO	Foreign Office
FOO	Free Officer Organization
KUSU	Khartoum University Student Union
ICF	Islamic Charter Front
IISH	Institute of International Social History (Amsterdam)
IJMES	International Journal of Middle East Studies
ILM	Islamic Liberation Movement
IMF	International Monetary Fund
JEM	Justice and Equality Movement
NCP	National Congress Party
NIF	National Islamic Front
NUP	National Unionist Party (Also National Umma Party)
NCF	National Consensus Forces
NISS	National Intelligence and Security Services
NSO	National Security Organization
PCP	Popular Congress Party
SANU	Sudan African National Union
SCAF	Supreme Council for the Armed Forces
SCP	Sudan Communist Party
SLM	Sudan Liberation Movement
SPLA	Sudan People's Liberation Army
SPLA-N	Sudan People's Liberation Army (North)
SSO	State Security Organization
SSU	Sudan Socialist Union
SWTUF	Sudanese Workers' Trade Union Federation
TNA	The National Archives
TMC	Transitional Military Council
UNF	United National Front

# Introduction

Speaking of Tunisia's Jasmine Revolution in the wake of the 2011 Arab Spring, the Sudanese president Umar al-Bashir declared: 'We are the people of *intifadas* and people know this. We were never imitators.'<sup>1</sup> While this statement suggested that he was not afraid of alluding to the uprisings that removed his military predecessors in 1964 and 1985, he later declared that Sudan's '*intifada*' was the 1989 'Salvation Revolution', the term coined by the ideologues of the National Islamic Front to describe the military coup by means of which both they and al-Bashir seized the reins of power.<sup>2</sup> However, for most urban Sudanese, the country's real '*intifadas*' were the earlier civilian uprisings that overthrew Ibrahim Abboud and Jafa'ar Nimeiri. Unlocking their history is crucial to conserving and understanding Sudan's pre-1989 democratic heritage.

The uprisings of 1964 and 1985 are remarkable for the fact that they overthrew entrenched military regimes by largely pacific civil action at a time when authoritarian governments in Africa and the Middle East could usually be replaced only by military means. It is not surprising, therefore, that they are the subject of a passionate and yet somewhat critical nostalgia amongst both oppositionists and the public in general, both within Sudan and the diaspora. They are proud to have participated in such exceptional political events and yet lament the failure of these uprisings to realize the promise they offered. While the two uprisings were treated with euphoria in the country at the time, the periods of liberal democracy that they ushered in failed to satisfy the ambitions of their engineers and were unable to prevent the re-emergence of the military in 1964 and 1985. In this regard, they offer a lesson – perhaps a warning – for the current generation of activists in both Sudan and the wider region. This book examines precisely why Sudan was able to produce such rare political phenomena, and attempts to explain why they eventually provoked such disappointment.

## Sudan and previous interpretations of regime change in the Middle East

Both the October Revolution of 1964 and the April *Intifada* of 1985 provide significant anomalies that challenge dominant perceptions of regime change and the potential for it in the Middle East. A great number of scholars in the wider field of Middle Eastern studies have dealt with these anomalies by merely ignoring them. The analysis of Mehran Kamrava is typical of this myopia. He contends that in the 1950s and 1960s,

a new generation of 'second stage' states emerged that overthrew the 'traditional' states which had emerged under colonialism and replaced them with modern and transformative substitutes. He insists that all these states 'originated from the ranks of the military and continued to rely heavily on the armed forces to carry out their domestic as well as international agendas.'<sup>3</sup> Kamrava further informs us that:

Colonel Nasser and the Free Officers in Egypt started the phenomenon in 1952, to be followed in 1956 by Tunisia's independence from France, the 1958 coup by Abd al-Karim Qassem and his Free Officers in Iraq, Algeria's independence from France in 1962, the Ba'thist coup in Syria in 1963, *the so-called October Revolution in Sudan in 1964* [italics added], and the coup in Libya by Muammar Qaddafi and his Free Officers in 1969.<sup>4</sup>

The October Revolution cannot be compared straightforwardly to these events, certainly not those that involved military coups. It did not 'originate from the ranks of the military,' and there were no military personnel in either the transitional regime that followed it or the subsequent parliamentary government. The fact that it did bring about a period of liberal parliamentary democracy makes it a strikingly different example from all the others cited by Kamrava. One wonders whether he is confusing it with Jafa'ar Nimeiri's 'May Revolution' of 1969, which amounted to a military coup led by the Sudanese army's own Free Officer movement.

It might appear pedantic to address this error in such detail. However, the mistake cited here is not an isolated slip, but typical of a wider series of defects in approaches towards Sudan in the Middle Eastern studies literature. For instance, Nikkie Keddie, summarizing the history of successful anti-regime mobilization in the region since the Iranian Revolution, observes that between 1979 and 2011, 'the Shah of Iran and the presidents of Egypt, Tunisia and Libya have been overthrown.'<sup>5</sup> Keddie thus omits the 1985 *Intifada* against Jafa'ar Nimeiri. Where the 1964 and 1985 uprisings are discussed in more general histories of the modern Middle East, it usually occurs in passing and the events are not subjected to rigorous analysis from which serious conclusions can be drawn.<sup>6</sup>

Perhaps the reason for this is that Middle East specialists have not been willing to study a country regarded as being on the 'periphery' of their region in a manner that would force them to re-evaluate the thesis of 'Middle East exceptionalism'. The proponents of this thesis, which posits that Middle Eastern societies and regimes are unreceptive to Western-style democratic change, often observe that the word *hizb*, which means 'political party' in contemporary Arabic, has very negative connotations in Islamic culture, implying division and factionalism.<sup>7</sup> They argue that Muslim societies are collectivist and communal and tend to authoritarianism or even totalitarianism in their political systems, and often go on to claim that it was for this reason that communism was popular in the region in the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>8</sup> This is perhaps why one general history of the modern Middle East attributes responsibility for both the October Revolution and the April *Intifada* directly to the Sudan Communist Party.<sup>9</sup>

While anti-regime mobilization in the 1950s and 1960s was associated with the political left, civilian opposition in the 1970s and 1980s is attributed by Middle East

historians to the rise of political Islam as the dominant regional ideology, which by the 1990s was considered by many commentators to be the 'only realistic major alternative movement to most of the authoritarian regimes'.<sup>10</sup> Ayubi states:

The really important point to emphasise is that whereas opposition movements in other regions almost universally espoused – or at least declared – Western-style democratic values, movements that campaigned explicitly for democratic politics were relatively weak in authoritarian Muslim societies in the 1980s. By contrast, the most powerful opposition came from the so-called 'Islamic fundamentalists'.<sup>11</sup>

It has also been observed that the specific cultural and religious make-up of Middle Eastern society puts Islamist organizations in the best position to mobilize political dissent. Denoux maintains that 'through the social ties built around mosques, preachers, and Islamic associations, Islam offers a ready-made basis for recruitment, proselytization, and clandestine activities'.<sup>12</sup> He further argues that 'Islamic groups and institutions' provide a 'zone of autonomy from the state' because any act conducted by the government that targets this zone threatens its own legitimacy.<sup>13</sup> Kamrava claims that from the 1970s 'Islam emerged as a far more viable medium for political opposition', which 'was likely to come from the conservative *ulama*, activist intellectuals, or, most commonly, relatively moderate Islamist parties or fundamentalist organizations'.<sup>14</sup>

The belief that 'Islamism', an ideology defined in monolithic terms, offered the only alternative to the existing system of secular authoritarianisms has, in turn, limited the parameters of the debate about democracy. As Muhammad Arkoun lamented in 2002, 'discussions about religion, secularisation, culture, governance, democracy and economy are being conducted within the traditional system of belief about the imagined, never concretely actualised Community (*umma*) and its purported "authentic" ahistorical Islam, or within the vocabulary, definitions and forms of reasoning borrowed from European thought and arbitrarily projected on this idealised, imagined, unrealistic Islam defended as the alternative "model" to the Western universalised paradigm'.<sup>15</sup> 'Islamism' and Western-style democracy were portrayed as mutually exclusive options.

The 2011 Arab Spring provoked a series of challenges to this dominant analytical framework. Asef Bayat insists that the 'social earthquakes' brought about by the Arab Spring should 'undermine "Middle East exceptionalism", with its culturalist focus on "stagnant culture", "fatalist Muslims" and "unchangeable polity"'. Work on political Islam, he concludes, will therefore 'take a back seat in favour of themes and methods that bring Middle Eastern politics into the realm of global social theory and comparative work'.<sup>16</sup> In a similar fashion, Laurence Louer, observing that the most striking feature of the anti-regime uprisings in the Arab world is that 'they depart from Islamist identity politics', states that we now need to analyse whether political movements focusing on political freedom and the reduction of social inequality are a genuinely novel product of the Arab Spring or whether they have existed in the past and remained under-analysed.<sup>17</sup> The latter would certainly seem to be the case, at least in the Sudanese context. Nevertheless, a great deal of research has been undertaken recently on non-violent social movements in the wider Middle East. It has tended to



focus on the use of non-violent methods in campaigns for national independence in Lebanon, Western Sahara and Palestine during the Iranian Revolution, which eventually turned violent, and in single issue campaigns, such as protests against corruption in Egypt.<sup>18</sup> Remarkably, these scholars have not turned their attention to the one country in the region where non-violent methods were successfully used, not once but twice, to unseat a military regime and replace it with a liberal democratic one.

The point that non-religious and purely civilian movements have been capable of overthrowing dictatorial regimes and introducing parliamentary democracy has of course already been observed by Sudan scholars. Woodward states that the National Alliance, which engineered the 1985 *Intifada*, 'represented in essence the same spirit of essentially secular nationalism amongst the intelligentsia who had a long and honourable history in Sudanese politics'.<sup>19</sup> Gallab comments that the success of these two uprisings has led to the emergence of a 'civil religion' amongst the Sudanese intelligentsia, one aspect of which is the belief that purely peaceful civilian opposition can remove even the most entrenched of military regimes.<sup>20</sup> The Sudanese intellectual elite coined the term 'modern forces' (*al-quwwat al-haditha*) to describe the various educated and professional civilian bodies that steered the two uprisings. It will be seen in this study that it was not just mosques and Islamic associations that provided the networks through which anti-regime activity was mobilized; schools, universities, professional association headquarters, public squares and law courts also proved to be important loci for the spreading of dissent against the regime.

The Sudanese uprisings could therefore be characterized as 'secular' phenomena, although this depends upon which of the competing definitions of the word 'secular' we choose to apply. As Charles Tripp observes, the word 'secular' can either be associated with 'a determined assault against religion, its symbols, its hold on people's imaginations', or be used more broadly, but perhaps more accurately, as a descriptor of 'things of this world, as opposed to those of the hereafter, as well as the affairs of lay organizations and institutions'.<sup>21</sup> If the second definition is accepted, then it should be acknowledged that religio-political movements are frequently compelled to exploit 'secular' spaces so as to achieve their wider political goal of increasing the role of religion in everyday life and politics.<sup>22</sup> As will be seen in this monograph, Islamists of various hues frequently pursued this tactic so as to mobilize support against the regime during the two uprisings.

Existing writing on Sudan tends to characterize the 'modern forces' – which it identifies as being closely linked with the left and the Sudan Communist Party – and the 'Islamists' as two separate categories.<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, theorists of opposition politics and the history of anti-regime mobilization in Sudan need to beware of establishing too rigid a dichotomy between the various forces associated with political Islam and the supposedly more secular and 'civil' political groupings such as democratic political parties, professional associations, youth and student groups and labour unions. The Arabic term for 'civil society', *al-mujtama' al-madani*, is rooted in a long history of civic practice within Muslim society dating back to the medieval period, when urban markets and institutions constituted spheres within which there was considerable independence from the state.<sup>24</sup> As Graham Fuller has observed, the authoritarian governments of the twentieth century acted as the exception, not the rule, in restricting



this sphere of autonomy from the state.<sup>25</sup> One would therefore be mistaken to assume that proponents of political Islam were somehow incapable of engaging in 'civil' practice. It is well documented that mainstream Islamist parties in countries such as Jordan, Tunisia and Egypt have chosen to utilize non-violent methods of resistance to regime repression, including participation in elections.<sup>26</sup>

Here we will see that in practice, a considerable number of the individuals affiliated with 'civil' bodies in Sudan, such as student unions and professional associations, espoused one form or another of political Islam themselves, whether as a matter of individual conviction or because they were members of an Islamist political party. This will be demonstrated with particular reference to such individuals as Hasan al-Turabi, Muhammad Salih Umar, Jizouli Dafaallah, Mirghani al-Nasri and Umar Abd al-Ati. It will be seen that this was the case even in 1985, when the major party affiliated with the Islamic Movement – al-Turabi's Islamic Charter Front – distanced itself from the main opposition grouping. Moreover, it will be seen that a number of the political parties that supported the 1964 and 1985 uprisings espoused democratic and liberal principles and yet campaigned for an Islamic constitution and *shari'a* law in a manner similar to the parties more directly inspired by regional political Islam. This is easy to understand if we apply the 'bazaar' model of Islam, understanding that, in Chatterjee's words, 'it can be *signified* as different things by different people using a set of *signs*'.<sup>27</sup> Certain groups might identify as 'Islamic' certain objectives but not others – for instance, the duty to resist an oppressive ruler but not the principle of establishing God's sovereignty (*hakimiyya*) in his place.

In many ways, the outlook of these parties and individuals was similar to the type of thinking now associated with 'post-Islamism' – this was illustrated, for instance, in their recognition that moral and religious reform could not be imposed top-down by the state.<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, it was precisely because the anti-regime movement comprised individuals with both secular and Islamist outlooks that such significant discord emerged within the ranks of Sudanese pro-democracy forces, as these groups struggled to come to an agreement with leftists and secularists over the manner of government that should replace the ousted military regimes.

Similarly, an understanding of divisions within the army and other branches of the security forces should prove useful in enabling us to understand why the uprisings against the military regimes evolved in the manner in which they did. Analysts of the 2011 revolution in Egypt tend to represent the Egyptian military as an all-powerful force, emancipated from society and able to manipulate political parties to serve its own purposes.<sup>29</sup> However, this was not the case in Sudan at the time of the two uprisings. Woodward observes that the Sudanese army has always been 'not so much a detached institution (as Latin American armies are often alleged to be and perhaps, nearer at hand, the Egyptian Army is) as something of a mirror of Sudanese society, if a somewhat uneven one'.<sup>30</sup> In light of this, Sudan offers a useful case study for the investigation of Yezid Sayigh's post-Arab Spring observation that we might better understand security forces in the Middle East as 'manifestations of more fragmented political institutions and social forces and consequently as performing distinct, and potentially divergent functions constantly evolving in relation to each other'.<sup>31</sup> In Sudan, the army had never been emancipated from the major social and

political forces within the country, and divisions within the army or between the army and other branches of the security forces have played important roles during both uprisings (see Chapter 5).

The Sudanese uprisings also offer a means to test other analyses of anti-regime mobilization and transition that have been posited in the aftermath of the 'Arab Spring'. For instance, George Joffe has suggested that a distinction can be made between the nature of anti-regime uprisings in 'liberalized autocracies' such as Tunisia and Egypt on the one hand, and outright dictatorial regimes such as that which existed in Libya on the other. Joffe suggests that the fact that both Egypt and Tunisia were 'liberalized autocracies' guaranteed that the protests against these regimes took on a more civil and peaceful character than they did in Libya.<sup>32</sup> Daniel Brumberg characterizes a 'liberalized autocracy' as a regime that does not possess a dominant ideology and tolerates political dissonance so that it can play various factions off against each other.<sup>33</sup> Going by this definition, the military regimes that preceded both the 1964 and 1985 uprisings in Sudan could, with some reservations, probably be described as 'liberalized autocracies'. The complex manner in which party politics, state, and society are all interwoven in Sudan made it challenging for any one political faction to remain dominant in the period between 1956 and 1989. The country thus offers an interesting test case for Joffe's argument. At the same time, it will be seen that the 1964 and 1985 uprisings occurred precisely because Abboud and Nimeiri's attempts to play the political parties off against each other and to incorporate them into a system of 'liberalized autocracy' had failed.

The events of 1964 and 1985 can also act as case studies to examine the importance of economic factors in anti-regime mobilization in the Middle East. Joffe has observed that the global food price crisis formed an 'essential background' to the Arab Spring but that economic circumstances did not represent a 'complete explanation in themselves', insisting that the repressive nature of Arab regimes was also an important factor.<sup>34</sup> It should be observed that Sudan in 1985 was one of many countries within the Middle Eastern region that witnessed popular protests against rising commodity prices, which were the result of IMF-imposed austerity measures brought in by autocratic regimes. The governments of Tunisia, Algeria, Egypt, Morocco and Jordan were faced with widespread urban protests.<sup>35</sup> However, it was only in Sudan that these protests resulted in the downfall of the regime. This suggests that there was something specific about the nature of the political situation in Sudan that led to the protesters successfully dislodging Nimeiri's dictatorship. At the same time, it will be seen that the October Revolution of 1964 did not occur at the time of any particularly severe economic crisis.

### The relevance of Africanist historiography to the 1964 and 1985 uprisings

It could be argued that the reason why Middle Eastern historiography has neglected the events of 1964 and 1985 is that Sudan is really an 'African' state and is best dealt with by those with a research focus on sub-Saharan Africa. However, African historians

themselves seem to have shown little interest in engaging with the two uprisings as rare occasions on which civilian movements unseated entrenched military regimes through purely civil action. Martin Meredith summarizes the events surrounding the October Revolution thus:

When General Abboud stepped down in 1964, the northern politicians who succeeded him rejected any form of self-determination or regional autonomy for the south and pursued the same policies of repression. Their goal was the establishment of an Islamic republic.<sup>36</sup>

Meredith's narrative eschews examination of the October Revolution as an event in its own right so as to focus on the two main themes that scholars in the wider field associate with Sudan: political Islam and civil war. Most of the major African studies text books that deal with Sudan provide index references to subjects such as 'Islamization', 'civil war' or 'Darfur', but not to the two civilian uprisings that are so widely celebrated by urban elites within Sudan itself.<sup>37</sup> Perhaps the uprisings do, to some extent, deserve this neglect, for they were mainly limited to the urban towns of the north and were unable to forestall the rise of political Islam in Sudan or bring a halt to either of the civil wars (the October Revolution broke out during the first civil war, the April *Intifada* during the second). However, they are ignored all too easily by a master-narrative that interprets the post-Cold War era as the age of democratic mobilization and suggests that autocracy was the norm in sub-Saharan Africa between the 1960s and 1980s.<sup>38</sup> This narrative is Eurocentric in that it tends to attribute the failings of democracy in Africa in this period to the desire of the Western powers to shore up dictatorships that would act as a bulwark against communism.<sup>39</sup> It rarely investigates cases where local drives for democracy enabled African states to buck the trend.<sup>40</sup> Since the Sudanese uprisings occurred before the Western drive for democratization in Africa in the 1990s, they offer an excellent opportunity to study the local as opposed to the global causes of pro-democracy activism, and thus construct an anti-Eurocentric narrative of civil protest.

Looking at the wider trends in African contemporary history could help explain why the people of Sudan were able to oust their military dictators in this period whereas their Middle Eastern counterparts failed. Understanding the difference between the two types of state is crucial here. As Bayart observes, although African rulers have tended to identify with the authoritarian rulers of the Middle East, they have yet to achieve the 'well policed state' to which they aspire.<sup>41</sup> Part of the reason for this lies in the extremely limited efforts made by sub-Saharan Africa's colonizers to develop state infrastructures and the considerable geographical extent of the largest post-colonial African states.<sup>42</sup> These weaknesses have made post-colonial African regimes more vulnerable to overthrow and have enabled social forces similar to those that engineered the 1964 and 1985 uprisings in Sudan to play a role in destabilizing particular post-colonial regimes – although in such cases it has usually been either the military or a foreign power that applied the *coup de grace*.<sup>43</sup> These problems were particularly manifest in Sudan, which was not just the largest post-colonial African state (until the secession of the south in 2011) but has historically been forced to divert a considerable amount of its military resources to attempting to retain control of its sizeable peripheries.<sup>44</sup>



It will be seen throughout this work that it was the sharp divide between the 'centres' and 'peripheries' of the Sudanese state that shaped the context in which the two uprisings broke out, and that can also help explain why they ultimately failed to achieve their goals. Although both originated at the 'centres' of Sudanese society, it is still important to understand the manner in which they were defined by the country's 'centre-periphery' dynamic. Most scholars tend to identify this divide as one of the most important themes in Sudanese post-colonial politics. El-Battahani concludes that the key government institutions since independence have been dominated by the 'Riverain Arab-Muslim Power Bloc'.<sup>45</sup> In particular, this power bloc focuses on acquiring jobs and developmental resources for three particular ethnic groups from the northern riverain region: the Shayqiyya, Ja'aliin and Danagla.<sup>46</sup> Analysts of the country's post-colonial wars have held this riverain 'Arab' bias within the state to be one of the key causes of conflict in Sudan, as rebel movements on the peripheries have developed 'Africanist' ideologies to counteract the central Arabizing and Islamizing discourse.<sup>47</sup>

To acknowledge the dominant position of these central factions is not to contend that the centre is coherent in nature. Political scientists have identified a number of competing groups at the centre of the Sudanese state. However, the nature of the centre-periphery schism in Sudan prevents conflict between these groups from radically restructuring the social and political fabric. Alex De Waal writes: 'Because all the competing factions are drawn from the same social stratum, which is located in Khartoum and its environs, they share a common agenda of keeping power within this oligarchy. On this, they cooperate.'<sup>48</sup> Understanding this shared set of interests within the riverain elite enables us to explain why the two uprisings unfolded in the relatively peaceful manner in which they did. As will be seen, army and police officers were wary of using excessive force against uprisings spearheaded by their fellows within the riverain elite. Moreover, while elite groups at the riverain centre tried to exploit the chaotic situation in the periphery during the 1964 and 1985 uprisings to further their struggles against the dominant factions within the elite, they proved unwilling or unable to answer the needs of these marginalized peripheries even after unseating the autocratic regimes in Khartoum. This is partly because of the parochial outlook of the more conservative elements within the riverain elite, and partly because the sheer size of Sudan's peripheries ensured that exporting the achievements of the uprisings to the countryside proved a thankless task. It will be seen that the failure of the 'modern forces' to bring their revolutions to the rural areas of Sudan in turn contributed to the failure of the uprisings at the centre, as the same peripheral crises that had shaped the first two uprisings once more fed back into the centre.

### Sudanese politics and the historiography of the 1964 and 1985 uprisings

The manner in which the 1964 and 1985 uprisings have been represented in Sudan itself has constantly shifted in accordance with changes in the nature of the regime, the status of the media and the dominant ideology. Given that one of the immediate

results of the October Revolution was the liberalization of the press, it is perhaps not surprising that the Sudanese political classes generated a wide variety of different representations of the uprisings. However, mainstream media organs run by the Khartoum intelligentsia, such as *al-Sahafa*, *al-Ayyam* and *al-Ra'i al-Aam*, tended broadly to interpret October 1964 as a genuinely national revolution – the word *thawra*, or revolution, was used ubiquitously – in which ‘the Sudanese people’ as a whole had played the decisive role. The literature produced by the various political parties of the post-October period interpreted these events somewhat more selectively, although they were compelled to acknowledge the role played by Sudanese society at large. The Sudan Communist Party even produced its own official history of the October Revolution, entitled ‘The Revolution of the People: The Struggle of the Nation against Dictatorship’ (*Thawrat al-Sha'ab: Kifah al-Umma didda al-Diktaturiyya*), outlining the importance of its own contribution.<sup>49</sup> Press organs linked to parties on the religious right, such as *al-Umma* (of the Umma Party) and *al-Mithaq al-Islami* (of the Islamic Charter Front) also produced somewhat more selective analyses of the revolution.

It is often asserted, particularly by critics on the political left, that after Jafa'ar Nimeiri seized power during the Free Officers' coup of 1969, his new military regime attempted to erase all memories of the popular uprising against the old one. What would perhaps be fairer to say is that Nimeiri and the ideologues of the May Regime suppressed representations of the October Revolution that were inconsistent with its own particular media agenda. Accounts were produced that downplayed the role of the political parties, especially the Communists, and highlighted the role of the army and, in particular, the Free Officer movement. On its nineteenth anniversary, Badreldin Suleiman – a top official in Nimeiri's Sudan Socialist Union – observed that the October Revolution was the child of the ‘revolutionary alliance of the popular forces and the Free Officer movement.’<sup>50</sup> The May 1969 Free Officer coup was thus represented as a ‘completion’ of the socialist principles asserted by the revolution. Rather than suppressing memories of the October Revolution, the May Regime attempted to appropriate them for itself.

Following Nimeiri's ouster in 1985, the press, liberated once more, again produced a wide range of perspectives on both the October Revolution and the uprising that had brought about his downfall, and party leaders used their newly licensed newspapers to highlight their own participation in these events. In particular, there was a great expansion in the number of press organs associated with the Islamic Movement (NIF) – the new political wing of the Sudanese Muslim Brotherhood – including newspapers such as *al-Sudani*, *al-Raya*, *al-Adwa* and *al-Siyasa*. These media organs gave a voice not just to NIF members who claimed to have played a significant role in 1964 or 1985, but also to figures within the army and the professional movement seen as sympathetic to the NIF, such as Siwar al-Dahab, Jizouli Dafa'allah and Taj al-Din Fadl. However, more independent and centrist media organs such as *al-Ayyam* and *al-Sahafa* continued to interpret the 1964 and 1985 uprisings in a broadly national context and to give voices to more neutral figures such as Jafa'ar Karrar, the leader of the ‘Professional Front’ in 1964.

After Umar al-Bashir's military coup of 1989, press reports on the October and April uprisings again provided a very selective interpretation of these events, rather



than attempting to banish them from memory entirely. For instance, in 1996 *al-Sudan al-Hadith* published an article commemorating the 32nd anniversary of the October Revolution, which mainly consisted of an interview with NIF leader Hasan al-Turabi, who focused largely on glorifying his own role.<sup>51</sup> Al-Bashir has also sought to manipulate the memory of the two uprisings to serve his agenda, adopting the slogan 'one army, one people' (*jayshun wahid shaabun wahid*) during public addresses, the slogan that was chanted by the crowds in 1985 to express their pleasure at the army's decision not to take action against the demonstrators.<sup>52</sup> As observed above, in the wake of the 2011 Arab Spring, far from trying to hide the history of popular uprisings against the two military presidents who had preceded him, al-Bashir declared that the Sudanese were 'the people of *intifadas*' and did not need to imitate the Tunisian one.<sup>53</sup> This was presumably an attempt to either suggest that no more *intifadas* were necessary because the previous ones had achieved their goals or deter the Sudanese public from mimicking the Tunisian uprising for fear of being branded copycats. However, al-Bashir has at other times attempted to claim that his military coup of 1989 amounted to Sudan's 'Arab Spring' – deliberately missing the point that the Arab Spring uprisings were civilian in nature.<sup>54</sup>

Since the semi-liberalization of the press following the 2005 Naivasha peace deal with the south, a far wider range of views on the October Revolution has emerged in the press and the 1964 and 1985 uprisings have come to be debated in a relatively open manner, as was the case during the period of liberal democracy. Not surprisingly, the Arab Spring of 2011 provoked Sudanese media organs to conduct a wide variety of interviews and write in-depth analyses of their own two 'Arab Springs' so as to correct statements made in the international and regional media along the lines that the Tunisian, Egyptian and Libyan uprisings had been the first successful anti-regime revolts in the post-colonial Arab world.

In particular, leftists, secularists and pro-democrats have railed against Umar al-Bashir for inducing the Sudanese people to 'forget' the memory of their famous uprisings, seeing it as their responsibility to re-enlighten a generation of university students who grew up without serious knowledge of the events of October 1964 in particular.<sup>55</sup> Leaders of the regional rebel movements such as Yasir Arman of SPLA-North have also attempted to represent the uprisings of 1964 and 1985 as historical precedents for the Arab Spring and as models for the current Sudanese generation to emulate.<sup>56</sup> At the same time, a number of the Islamists who have become disillusioned with the ruling National Congress Party since the downfall of the first Islamic Republic in 1999 have also begun to remember the two uprisings with a certain wistful nostalgia.<sup>57</sup>

Some Sudanese columnists have even attempted to make claims that Sudan was the 'beginning' of the Arab Spring, and that the revolutions in Libya, Egypt and Tunisia were the result of lessons taught to the other peoples of the Middle East by the Sudanese.<sup>58</sup> Other more sober commentators have made the more realistic point that the revolutionaries of Egypt, Tunisia and Libya *could* learn a great deal from the historical experience of the Sudanese. For instance, Mahjub Irwa advises the politicians of Egypt and Tunisia not to make the same mistake as the Sudanese in rushing into elections without creating the conditions in which a functioning democracy can thrive.

He also warns today's revolutionaries that Sudan has learnt from hard experience in 1964 and 1985 that simply overthrowing the regime does not ensure the emergence of a democratic system of rule.<sup>99</sup> Hopefully, the following chapters will offer useful insights to people in Sudan, and the wider Middle Eastern and African region, who are struggling to achieve peaceful transitions to democracy.

## The October Revolution and its Causes

Hasan al-Turabi, one of the principal protagonists of the October Revolution, would celebrate it a year after its outbreak as a 'Revolution of the people' that represented a 'comprehensive movement which aimed to destroy the existing system of life and rebuild a new philosophy'.<sup>1</sup> Remembering it nearly five decades later on, other Sudanese are less sanguine in their judgements. Abd al-Rahim al-Qurayshi, the nephew of its most famous martyr, now laments that his uncle died for nothing because 'the democracy and freedom on behalf of which [he] was martyred were broken down because of the destructive practises of the political parties and military rule returned twice and the result ... is that the October Revolution failed to achieve any of its goals'.<sup>2</sup> Thus, it is worth asking whether the events of October 1964 still deserve to be termed a 'Revolution', given the palpable frustration that many of their participants have expressed at the political failings of the period of parliamentary democracy that they ushered in. These failings will be examined in later chapters, but for now the analysis will focus on the brief 10-day period in which Abboud's regime was brought down by mass civilian demonstrations. The debate over whether what occurred during this time constituted a revolution is a challenging one to resolve, for two main reasons. First of all, there is no consensus on the definition of the term 'revolution'. A wide range of theorists have disputed whether or not revolutions must necessarily involve violence, and whether they can be purely political in nature or must bring about fundamental social change to merit the term.<sup>3</sup> Secondly, so many different political factions had a stake in the October Revolution that it is represented in a number of different ways in Sudan itself – as an uprising of the oppressed working classes by the communists, as a religiously inspired movement by the Muslim Brotherhood, and as a nationalist uprising by those not affiliated to either of these major ideological groupings.

It will be seen here that the events of the 'October Revolution' at least fit the narrow definition of a 'political revolution' – an episode in which a marginalized intelligentsia mobilizes itself to bring down a regime.<sup>4</sup> They could also be deemed 'revolutionary' if we embrace the concept of revolution which emphasizes mass popular involvement. Kamrava – who, as was seen in the introduction, chooses to refer to the 'so-called' October Revolution – argues that revolutions involve 'millions of people for whom pursuing a cause has become more pressing than the chores of daily life'.<sup>5</sup> If he were to apply this criterion to the events that surrounded the downfall of Abboud, then perhaps he might reconsider his downplaying of the term 'Revolution'. Few observers have denied the breadth of civilian participation in the uprising that overthrew Abboud,

Sudan's first military president. Moreover, by demonstrating that an unarmed public could unseat an entrenched military regime through purely civil protest, the Sudanese had confounded the expectations of Western diplomatic observers, and established a new set of protest norms that challenged existing assumptions that regimes in the Middle Eastern and African region could only be brought down by – usually military – force. In this sense, the events of October 1964 were at the very least highly remarkable, if not revolutionary. Thus it might be said that the October Revolution has been so called because of its short-term as opposed to its long-term achievements.

Nevertheless, in drawing attention to the apparently pacific nature of some of the civil protests, we should not neglect the manner in which religious and national ideals helped to define the events of October 1964. One of the most intriguing aspects of the civilian protest movement was that whilst it espoused apparently secular and universalist slogans, it counted among its foremost protagonists men who would later act as the vanguard of political Islam in Sudan. Here we will address this seeming paradox by looking at the manner in which Sudan's educated elite interpreted the October Revolution as one link in a chain of broadly defined 'national' events, thus enabling ideological differences to be temporarily overcome. At the same time, it will contend that the urban protesters' identification with a geographically and socially limited understanding of the Sudanese nation inherited from the colonial period was one of the civilian uprising's least revolutionary aspects and, ultimately, one of its greatest flaws.

Revolutions take different forms. For example, some are planned, some are spontaneous and others are negotiated.<sup>6</sup> It is important to address these questions of agency and causation, since in the Sudanese context they are closely related to debates as to which particular political and social forces were responsible for the uprising. Critics and participants who claim that the Revolution was 'planned' give the greatest credit to the political parties – usually either the communists or Muslim Brotherhood – for preparing the ground for the revolution. Meanwhile, those who argue that it was 'spontaneous' attribute it largely to the professional movement that was formed during the Revolution itself, and – as was the case in the Egyptian and Tunisian uprisings of 2011 – to the urban public in general. However, it is difficult to impose a definite classification on the October Revolution, in spite of the efforts of various political groupings to do so. The form assumed by this revolution varied with the stage it had reached: planning for the overthrow of Abboud was the hallmark of the first period, but it was spontaneous events which precipitated his downfall, followed by a period of negotiation. This chapter contends that it was micro-social rather than macro-social and macro-political factors that helped facilitate the ouster of Abboud.<sup>7</sup> To appreciate fully the fact that the downfall of Abboud was far from inevitable, we must examine the nature of his regime in the years leading up to his downfall.

## The November Regime and the 'southern problem'

In some respects, the downfall of the 'November Regime', which ruled Sudan between 1958 and 1964, was far from surprising. Having been in power for only 6 years, it



was far less entrenched at the time of its overthrow than the governments that were ousted by the revolutions in Iran in 1979, or Egypt, Tunisia and Libya in 2011. From the beginning, it possessed only a narrow base of support and relied on coercion rather than consent. Yet it will be seen here that even in 1964, Western diplomats believed that General Abboud's position was secure, and the events that brought about his ouster, involving an opportunistic reaction by the northern educated elites to the crisis in southern Sudan, were still highly spontaneous and far from predictable in nature.

Sudanese verdicts on the 'November Regime' offer some clues to the reasons for the uprising against it. Its apologists tend to point to the fact that the Novemberists established a number of new development projects, including the Roseires and Khasm al-Girba dams, the railway line from Nyala to Wau, Shambat Bridge in the capital and the Khartoum-Wad Madani road.<sup>8</sup> Western scholars as well as Sudanese writers agree that whilst the November Regime may not have been able to engineer a great leap in economic development, its impact on the economy was not as destructive as that of later regimes. Bechtold, for example, observes that there had been a 'considerable rise in the standard of living' after 1958.<sup>9</sup> The communists criticized the regime for relying on American aid and turning Sudan into a debtor state,<sup>10</sup> but Abdullahi Ali Ibrahim recalls that the party was more focused on obtaining political freedoms for trade unions rather than responding to any general economic crisis.<sup>11</sup> Abboud's critics tend to implicitly acknowledge his regime's relative economic competence by focusing their criticism on its abuse of political freedom. Ahmad Ali Baggadi, for instance, states that 'because of its naiveté in listening only to supporters and drum-beaters, it believed that the people genuinely supported what it did. In reality, however, it was the first government that brought in preventative arrest (*al-i'taqaq al-tahafuzzi*), and the banning of political activity not supportive to the government'.<sup>12</sup>

For democratic critics, the 'original sin' of Abboud's regime was that it was brought about by a military coup. The initial justification for the military takeover, as indicated by Abboud's first radio broadcast, was that the military had no choice but to save the country from the chaos wrought by Sudan's previous rulers.<sup>13</sup> The October Revolution was not original in its introduction of liberal democratic politics, for Sudan had since independence in 1956 been ruled by a Westminster-style parliamentary system, which the country's British colonizers had established a mere 3 years before their departure. The roots of parliamentary democracy in Sudan were thus already present but shallow in nature, and even the leading parliamentarians themselves were not all committed to it. Historians have tended to accept that the military takeover occurred with the connivance of the incumbent Umma Party prime minister Abdullah Khalil, who was a soldier like Abboud.<sup>14</sup>

The new government was unabashedly autocratic in nature. Abboud instantly dissolved the national parliament and forbade public gatherings.<sup>15</sup> He also banned independent media, although privately owned newspapers would later be granted licenses to publish, albeit subject to long periods of suspension.<sup>16</sup> Political authority was to be centred upon a thirteen-strong 'Supreme Council for the Armed Forces' (SCAF), which itself conferred 'full legislative, executive and judicial powers' upon Abboud as both president and prime minister.<sup>17</sup> In spite of Abdullah Khalil's role in helping to organize the coup, the new government came to be dominated by



members of the Khatmiyya *Sufi* religious order who were sympathetic towards the People's Democratic Party (PDP), the party supported by the Khatmiyya at that time. The leading personalities in the regime – Ibrahim Abboud, the president, Ahmad Khair, the foreign minister, and Abu Rannat, the chief justice, were all members of the Shayqiyya ethnic group, which had close links to the Khatmiyya.<sup>18</sup> Meanwhile, the one prominent Umma-supporting general who participated in the coup, Abd al-Wahhab, was dismissed by Abboud in March 1959.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, unlike the more radical military regimes that had emerged in Egypt and Iraq, Abboud's government followed no grandiose ideological programme that might have been able to garner it mass support.<sup>20</sup> In short, from its earliest days the regime had an extremely narrow political base.

As a result of its limited support, the new regime depended on a degree of coercion to guarantee its survival. For example, in December 1959 a number of young officers from the Infantry School at Omdurman who attempted to overthrow the regime by force were hanged;<sup>21</sup> the year 1961 witnessed both the dissolution of the Sudan Railway Workers' Union and the closure of the University of Khartoum as a result of student protest.<sup>22</sup> Whilst arbitrary measures such as these would pale in comparison to those later employed by Nimeiri and al-Bashir, they were a political novelty at the time. As a result, in June 1961, the alleged torture of the young communist political detainee Mustafa Hassanain at the hands of the military in Kordofan led the Front of Opposition Parties (FOP), established by the Umma Party leader Siddiq al-Mahdi in 1960 and incorporating every major northern political party barring the PDP, to send a severe petition to the government.<sup>23</sup> This claimed that 'government terror has reached an extent that was not reached in the most destructive era of colonialism.'<sup>24</sup> The government responded by sending a number of the senior FOP members, including Isma'il al-Azhari and Abdullah Khalil, to a prison in Juba. Thus the very political classes that had failed so singularly to preserve liberal democracy were galvanized back into action as a result of the excesses of the military regime. Opposition to authoritarianism unified these elites in a manner that parliamentary democracy did not.

The frequent clashes with political opponents and constant resorts to coercion seemed to indicate that the regime was liable to be overthrown at any time. However, in the 2 years immediately preceding the Revolution the government actually appeared to have become more firmly rooted. Although the imprisoned politicians were released in January 1962, the death of Siddiq al-Mahdi in October 1961 and the secession of the Sudan Communist Party from the FOP in late 1962 seemed to have paralysed the opposition movement.<sup>25</sup> The British Ambassador Ian Scott maintained throughout 1962 and 1963 that the regime was better entrenched than it had been in its early years. In his Annual Review for 1962, he wrote:

One cannot prophesy stability for a regime which came in by a military coup ... with this proviso, however, I can see no threat to the president's personal position; and it does not seem to me that there is any possibility of any overthrow of the present regime except by a split among the top military leaders themselves ... nor are there clear signs of unrest or disloyalty among the more junior officers of the army: indeed, morale and self-confidence seem high.<sup>26</sup>

Scott did not believe that the civilian political opposition posed any particular threat to the persistence of Abboud and the SCAF. He cited a 'disgruntled politician' stating that 'all the ingredients of a revolutionary pie are present', but suggested 'this pie is half-baked and will not rise'.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, the ambassador did not believe that the widespread private criticism of the regime would amount to anything. He described it as 'at once uninhibited and ineffective',<sup>28</sup> and re-iterated similar views in his 1963 Annual Review, arguing that the government had 'steadily increased in self-confidence'.<sup>29</sup> We should note in this context that Scott was highly sympathetic to the Novemberists: he frequently expressed satisfaction with the close ties between the Sudan government and the UK, decried the idea that Sudan should return to 'one man one vote' and spoke fondly of the friendship that had developed between himself and the right-wing foreign minister Ahmad Khair.<sup>30</sup> Thus his contemptuous attitude towards the Sudanese opposition reflected to some extent his conservative political outlook.

The Americans appear to have been just as sceptical about the capacities of the civilian opposition. James Mocer, the United States Information Agency representative in Khartoum at the time, claims that he told US Embassy staff of his belief that the regime would be overthrown but was simply ignored. Mocer himself predicted a 'coup d'état' rather than a civilian uprising that would restore democracy.<sup>31</sup> It is hard to deny that there was something of a lull in active opposition to the regime between 1962 and 1964. The government did have to deal with a strike by the Gezira tenants in late 1963, but, as will be seen in Chapter 3, this was not supported by the Sudan Communist Party. This would seem to support the notion that the October Revolution was spontaneous in nature, rather than the result of a series of cumulative acts of organized resistance to the regime.

One of the curiosities of the events that produced the initial spark for the Revolution was that their context was provided by the debate over the political situation in southern Sudan, which did not become a major issue in northern Sudanese politics until late 1963. Historians usually speak of the 'Sudanese civil war' of 1955 to 1972.<sup>32</sup> However, after the mutiny of the southern army units, which had refused to be transferred to northern Sudan on the eve of independence in September 1955, the conflict had been fought at a relatively low level of intensity. The mutineers remained in the bush for a number of years with little significant external support and thus failed to establish themselves as a significant military threat to the regime.<sup>33</sup> After Abboud came to power in 1958, his government's policies of Arabization and Islamization stoked further discontent in the predominantly non-Muslim south. The November Regime increasingly Arabized the education system in the south, established Friday as the day of rest, and harassed Christian missionaries until finally expelling them altogether in 1964.<sup>34</sup> It also stepped up the military campaign against the mutineers and forced a great number of southern Sudanese politicians and students into exile.<sup>35</sup>

The 'southern problem' first became a major issue in northern politics following the raid by the southern 'Any-Nya' rebel movement on Wau, the capital of the southern province of Bahr al-Ghazal, in January 1964. The 'Any-Nya' had been established in 1963 as the military wing of the Sudan African National Union (SANU), a political movement that had been formed by exiled southern Sudanese politicians.<sup>36</sup> Although

the attack failed, it generated a great deal of publicity both inside and outside the country. Whilst the November Regime had imposed a strict media blackout regarding events in southern Sudan, the engagement at Wau was covered by Radio London and a number of other foreign news stations to which the educated urban populations of the north were able to listen.<sup>37</sup> This forced the regime to adopt a relatively accommodating attitude towards the press on the 'southern question' so as to maintain credibility. It permitted correspondents from two private newspapers, *al-Ayyam* and *al-Ra'i al-'Aam*, to travel to the south to report on the fallout from the attack on Wau and visit a large number of areas in order to report on the issue in a broad context.<sup>38</sup> 'What we published', claims Ahmad Ali Baggadi, the correspondent for *al-Ra'i al-'Aam*, 'caused widespread political debate'.<sup>39</sup> As a result of the extensive discussion of the southern situation among the northern educated classes and its own apparent inability to deal with the crisis in the region, in August 1964 the government appointed a commission to look into the background of the southern conflict and propose solutions.<sup>40</sup> This committee immediately invited public discussion of the 'southern problem' and the regime agreed to temporarily lift the restrictions it had imposed on freedom of speech in order to permit a candid debate.<sup>41</sup> This was the first time that such measures had been taken during Abboud's 6-year tenure.

The conflict in southern Sudan had thus, on account of the widespread international attention it generated, forced the regime to liberalize itself in a manner that previous political crises in the north had not. However, it is important to recognize that the Revolution occurred not because of pressure from southerners, but because northern intellectuals exploited the opportunities granted by the lifting of restrictions on freedom of speech to shift the focus of the debate from south to north. The famous debates on the 'southern question' soon came to have little to do with the south itself. The terms under which they were to be conducted very much reflected the northern point of view – the minister of information, who inaugurated the commission established by the government to oversee debates on the issue, declared that there would never have been a problem in the south had it not been for 'the conspiracies of colonialism' and that the purpose of the conference would '[whilst] leaving ... the principle of united government untouched, [be to] study the factors that have stood in the way of cohesion in north and south Sudan and recommend solutions which bring about mutual trust and achieve internal stability and unity'.<sup>42</sup> Since the overwhelming majority of southern political groups were at this time campaigning for either self-determination or regional autonomy, this statement did not bode well for serious north-south dialogue. Southerners themselves had only limited involvement in the discussion of the 'southern question' SANU boycotted the commission as soon as it was announced.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, although Khartoum University Student Union (KUSU) played a significant role during the debates, it did so with limited southern collaboration. This was because the Student Welfare Organization – the political front representing southern students – had left KUSU the previous year in protest against its refusal to condemn a painting displayed at a cultural exhibition depicting unclothed southerners fighting over food that had been thrown to them by a group of northerners.<sup>44</sup> The 'southern question' was, therefore, largely a product of northern politics.



It was Hasan al-Turabi, the university lecturer and expert in constitutional law who is today famous as the *éminence grise* of political Islam in Sudan, who played the most significant role in sidelining the 'southern problem' and focusing the debates on the political situation in the north. The scene of his intervention was the examination hall at Khartoum University, where the first of the great debates on the southern question was being held on 10 September under the aegis of the Society for Social Studies (*jama'iyya al-dirasat al-ijtima'iyya*).<sup>45</sup> This debate was attended by senior government representatives, including the finance minister Mamoun Biheiri, as well as representatives of both the SCP and Muslim Brotherhood, and the 'southern bloc' in the person of Ambrose Rini.<sup>46</sup> Its official purpose was to discuss 'the southern issue and its social aspects'.<sup>47</sup> Abdullahi Ali Ibrahim, who attended the discussion, recalls that he had prepared a paper on the history of slavery in southern Sudan that he never had the chance to read out.<sup>48</sup> This was because al-Turabi stole the limelight and transformed the nature of the debate with a speech insisting that the problems of the north and south could not be discussed in isolation from each other. He declared that the problem was one of political liberty and that the southern issue could be dealt with only by toppling the government in the north.<sup>49</sup>

Although the impact of the speech was immediate, its merits have been debated. Abdullahi Ali Ibrahim, although he admits that al-Turabi's speech gave inspiration to most of those present, laments that he effectively crippled any potential for serious discussion of the south as an issue in its own right by linking it directly to northern politics.<sup>50</sup> The future master of the Islamic Movement effectively set the pattern for the following seminars. The next symposium at the University of Cairo Khartoum Branch had a similar focus on politics in the north, as participants demanded constitutional reform as a pretext to resolve the southern conflict.<sup>51</sup> Following this meeting, Ahmad Ali Baggadi, who had done so much to publicize the southern issue, engaged in a series of acrimonious debates in *al-Ra'i al-'Aam* with al-Turabi's fellow *Ikhwan* lecturer Muhammad Salih Umar, who had spoken at the seminar and whom he accused of exploiting the southern issue for political purposes.<sup>52</sup>

The fact that the government sanctioned debates that led to such vociferous criticism of itself might suggest that it had moved in the direction of becoming a 'liberal autocracy'. However, understanding the political strategy being employed by Hasan al-Turabi and Muhammad Salih Umar, it soon moved to abort its liberalization measures. When the Khartoum University philosophical society attempted to prepare another seminar for 10 October, pressure was put on the Dean of the University Nadhir Dafa'allah to demand its cancellation.<sup>53</sup> However, KUSU went ahead with the seminar in spite of his protests and the university administration's tactic of flooding the intended meeting place with water.<sup>54</sup> Muhammad Salih Umar, Ahmad Ali Baggadi and Mukhtar al-Assam of the Umma Party were all preparing to speak when the police invaded the university and forced the meeting to disperse.<sup>55</sup> KUSU subsequently objected to the police action in a letter of protest that the executive committee carried directly to the ministry of interior, the result of which was that on 15 October the entire committee was arrested.<sup>56</sup> The replacement leadership, nevertheless, vowed to continue its struggle against the government and began to prepare another seminar to be held on 21 October.<sup>57</sup> This set the stage for the final confrontation with Abboud's regime.

Thus when the decisive seminar – at which no southern representatives were present<sup>58</sup> – took place, it symbolized the northern intelligentsia's struggle against an autocratic regime, and represented a fight for intellectual and political freedom *per se* more than a serious attempt to engage with the question of north-south relations. Rabie Hasan Ahmad, who became the president of KUSU following the arrest of his predecessor on 15 October, admitted in 2012 that 'All of us considered that any event ... in which people got up and talked ... would benefit the opposition movement ... even if the topic was a far off topic [i.e. the "southern problem"]'.<sup>59</sup> Thus, the chain of events that led up to 21 October was the product of the political opportunism of an educated elite more than a response to regional marginalization or economic misery. This is why the participants have tended to observe that the October Revolution 'had no social content', being focused largely on the restoration of democracy.<sup>60</sup> In this sense, it could be narrowly defined as a 'political revolution', in the sense of Huntingdon or Pareto, being led by an intellectual elite seeking greater representation for itself.<sup>61</sup> Al-Turabi's speech had focused purely on the issue of political liberty and had not berated the regime for its social or economic failings. He would have chosen this strategy because he knew that whilst the regime had presided over a period of relative social and economic stability, it had a decidedly less impressive record when it came to preserving democracy and basic freedoms. The fact that the regime had appeared relatively stable in the years preceding its overthrow, and that the issue that prompted the series of events preceding its downfall was one that impacted little on the lives of the northern Sudanese urban dwellers who ultimately drove the uprising, lends credence to the argument that the Revolution of October 1964 was spontaneous in nature.

### The martyrdom of Ahmad al-Qurayshi and the outbreak of the revolution

Ahmad Ali Baggadi, whose reporting from the south helped to provide the initial context for the fateful seminar of 21 October 1964, asserts that 'the success of the October Revolution came as a surprise to both the opposition and the government equally'.<sup>62</sup> This argument stands in contradistinction to the claims of the ideological movements on the left and to a lesser extent of those on the right – for both of which Baggadi shows equal contempt – that they planned the revolution.<sup>63</sup> These claims will be investigated in more depth in Chapter 3, but here the focus will be on the credibility of the argument that the outbreak of the anti-government uprising was spontaneous and its success far from inevitable.

One senior police officer who served during 1964 argues that the crisis of 21 October could have been avoided if the police had decided to wait for the students outside the university and had dispersed their demonstration after the seminar. Apparently the police leadership was divided over whether the force should actually enter the university itself.<sup>64</sup> This may have been true, but the police invasion of the campus during the 21 October seminar was not a one-off incident. It occurred in the context of periodic increases in tension between police and students throughout the November

Regime, during which armed policemen had invaded the university premises on a number of occasions.<sup>65</sup> As noted above, 11 days before the 21 October seminar, they had broken into the university and used the threat of force to close down the debate being organized by the previous KUSU executive committee.

The clash that broke out between the students and police on 21 October was far from spontaneous: it was part of a pattern. As a result of the previous clashes, a number of the students of Khartoum University, having armed themselves with tree branches and broken bottles, came to the seminar – which was attended by around 700 students – well prepared for a showdown.<sup>66</sup> As the police broke into the campus in the early stages of the seminar and began to issue dispersal orders, Anwar Nur al-Hadi, one of the members of the KUSU executive committee, began to chant the words ‘if one day the people wanted freedom, then there is no doubt that fate must answer, and that the night will pass, and that the chains will break...’<sup>67</sup> Nevertheless, it does not seem that the students seriously anticipated the political explosion that they were about to generate. ‘He who says we went to the seminar to topple the regime is a liar’, recalls one former student, ‘but events developed until [they brought about] the end of the regime’.<sup>68</sup>

The key event that guaranteed the 21 October seminar its place in history was the shooting of Ahmad al-Qurayshi, which nobody had predicted. It certainly does not appear that the students had intended to provoke the police into making a martyr of one of their number. Members of the KUSU executive committee claim that the students were surprised by the decision of the police to open fire.<sup>69</sup> Abdullahi Ali Ibrahim, who was a member of the 40-strong KUSU council at the time and had been nominated as the note-taker for the seminar, admits that by the time al-Qurayshi was shot, the student leaders had already dispersed and gone back to their hostels adjoining the university.<sup>70</sup> Those who carried on the fight, throwing bricks at policemen and engaging in running battles in the dormitories, were younger students who wanted ‘to have their university experience’.<sup>71</sup> It was these clashes that led directly to the shooting of al-Qurayshi. The exact circumstances in which he was killed remain obscure. Predictably, there are many theories both about how he died and what exactly caused the police to open fire. Shamouq admits that the young students spent a long time wearing the police down and forcing them to exhaust their supply of tear gas bombs, and that this played a major role in their eventual decision to open fire.<sup>72</sup> Nevertheless, although it is true that the clashes at the seminar did not happen in isolation from previous events, the KUSU leadership had clearly not planned that these young students would attack the police with such vigour, and that a death would result.

Al-Qurayshi’s martyrdom was a catalytic event, rapidly leading others in Khartoum to begin mobilizing in protest. When he succumbed to his wounds at Khartoum hospital later on in the evening of 21 October, party leaders, university lecturers, newspaper editors, schoolboys and students from the other universities in Khartoum all flocked there to find out what had happened.<sup>73</sup> However, even at this stage it was not inevitable that the bloody events at Khartoum University would lead to an uprising that would topple the regime. Al-Qurayshi’s funeral procession the next day introduced this possibility, but it was still far from inevitable that this would occur in the manner it did.



For the funeral procession to go ahead, the KUSU executive committee needed to obtain the permission of al-Qurayshi's relatives in Khartoum, and specifically of his uncle. Rabie Hasan Ahmad and the other executive committee members spent a great deal of time trying to persuade him to sanction the procession. He apparently vacillated and was at one stage adamantly against allowing his nephew's body to be taken by the students for any kind of ceremony.<sup>74</sup> Members of the police and one pro-government judge, Abd al-Rahman al-Aqab, turned up at the hospital early on the morning of 22 October and nearly managed to persuade the uncle to allow them to escort the corpse back to al-Qurayshi's home village, Garrasa.<sup>75</sup> It seems that he finally agreed after realizing that many of the nation's political leaders had arrived at the hospital to support the procession.<sup>76</sup>

The funeral procession itself accelerated the process of anti-regime mobilization to a considerable extent. The public funeral rites amounted in effect to a religious ceremony, which ended with Sadiq al-Mahdi, the great grandson of the famous Islamic revivalist Muhammad Ahmad al-Mahdi, offering prayers for the deceased. It was therefore difficult for the police to take action against those participating in the procession. This was in spite of the fact that al-Qurayshi's bier was drawing anti-regime protesters together with an almost magnetic force. Niblock estimates that 30,000 people eventually joined the procession.<sup>77</sup> For a while it remained a solemn religious affair, as the crowds, following negotiation between university lecturers and the police, were allowed to proceed to the Midan Abd al-Muni'im in south-west Khartoum. However, once the religious ceremony was complete and just as al-Qurayshi's body was being dispatched in a lorry to his home village, the scene was set for the crowds to rail against the government. Chanting 'the soldiers will fall', they started to attack police vehicles.<sup>78</sup> Al-Turabi, who had just addressed the demonstrators, argues that this was when he realized that 'this is going to be a revolution'.<sup>79</sup>

Even at this stage, the downfall of the November Regime was far from guaranteed, for the demonstrations that followed on Friday 23 October were not substantial ones.<sup>80</sup> What really shook the regime was the declaration of an immediate general strike by Abdin Isma'il, the chairman of the Bar Association, on 24 October. It seems that this idea had emerged during a meeting attended by various lawyers and university lecturers at Isma'il's office soon after the 22 October demonstration. Shawgi Mallasi, the Ba'athist lawyer who many claim initially proposed the strike at this meeting, cites the spontaneity of this decision as evidence that the Revolution had not been planned by any of the main parties.<sup>81</sup>

The strike call was made public by Isma'il from the roof of the main judiciary building, using the decision of the government to ban a protest by the various professional unions as its pretext. Abdin Isma'il's full statement read:

We have presented a memorandum of protest against the demonstration being banned from proceeding to the ministry of interior, and we consider that our mission does not end yet, and it is necessary for all organizations to co-operate closely to carry out the decision to launch a general political strike, and we are to gather together all the sectors of the people throughout this period so that we are able to create a national protest front to continue the struggle against the military government and I hope after that that we will move aside peacefully.<sup>82</sup>



It is widely agreed that the general strike was an overwhelming success. It paralysed economic life in the capital, disrupted all the major communications networks and cut off routes of supply to the army in the south.<sup>83</sup>

It did not take long after the declaration of the general strike for Abboud to concede to the protesters' demands. On 26 October, he made a radio broadcast announcing the immediate dissolution of the SCAF and cabinet, declaring that he would remain as head of state only so that a transitional government could be formed.<sup>84</sup> The departing president and a number of senior members of the military leadership then began to negotiate with a series of delegates from the United National Front, which had been jointly established by representatives of the political parties and professional movement.

Commentators on the October Revolution have offered a number of different explanations for Abboud's rapid capitulation. One theory credits the sheer effectiveness of the general strike; another popular interpretation is that it was pressure from the radical 'Free Officer' movement within the army; and another contends that the ageing general himself sympathized with the popular movement and was far less keen to maintain power than some of his more hard-line lieutenants in the SCAF. 'Abboud himself made the decision to resign, he never thought that he was so hated', recalls Ahmad Ali Baggadi.<sup>85</sup> Al-Turabi, who participated in the negotiations with Abboud that followed the 26 October broadcast, states: 'honestly, we were surprised by his modesty ... he said "I didn't make the November revolution.... I am an engineer and not a soldier, I don't want to kill another student, go to the authorities and negotiate with them"'.<sup>86</sup>

It is difficult to deny that Abboud was more malleable than SCAF members such as his temporary minister of interior Ahmad Rida Farid, who had threatened on 24 October to 'strike any more demonstrations with an iron fist'.<sup>87</sup> The admission of a former member of the Free Officer movement that Abboud had already made his decision to concede to the popular will on 25 October *before* the Free Officers surrounded the Republican Palace also suggests that the president himself played a significant role in bringing about the downfall of his regime.<sup>88</sup> However, it is worth noting that he did not concede immediately – the first decision he made on 25 October was to arrest two of the judges who had participated in the demonstration that led up to the declaration of civil disobedience, a decision he reversed 5 days later.<sup>89</sup> It seems likely, therefore, that the broad impact of the general strike played some part in forcing his hand. In spite of this, his subsequent flexible attitude played a major role in enabling the Revolution to take the relatively peaceful course that it did (and is probably why he was granted far more lenient treatment than the other members of the SCAF during the interim period).<sup>90</sup> This does not mean that October was a 'negotiated revolution' in the Kamrava sense. Kamrava defines a 'negotiated revolution' as one in which the 'state has become weak and vulnerable to pressure from society but is not weak enough to be overthrown, and the only solution is for representatives of state and society to negotiate a largely peaceful transfer of power'.<sup>91</sup> Abboud's decision to dissolve the SCAF does not exactly fit this model: given the comprehensive nature of the opposition to his regime, it would probably have been overthrown in a less ceremonious manner had he not capitulated so early on.

## Violent and non-violent aspects of crowd behaviour

For a number of the thinkers who influenced the Sudanese intellectual elite in the 1960s – most notably, Franz Fanon – violence was a necessary and integral aspect of revolutionary social and political change.<sup>92</sup> Yet the events of October 1964 challenge the notion that revolutions must be violent by definition. The fact that the anti-regime movement forced Abboud to start making concessions within a mere 5 days contributed to October 1964's reputation as a peaceful uprising. Nevertheless, it is not universally remembered as such. Abdullahi Ali Ibrahim laments that years of adaptation to authoritarianism under Umar al-Bashir have led people to adopt a cynical attitude towards the Revolution, associating it with 'vandalism' (*al-takhrīb*) rather than change (*al-taḥyīr*).<sup>93</sup> It is true that Revolution was marked by violence at key stages; however, it is not fair to say that it was this violence that played the decisive role in forcing the regime to abandon power.

What can be said is that the spark of the Revolution was provided by a genuinely violent confrontation between the students of Khartoum University and the police on 21 October. Even sources sympathetic to the students concede that their use of force – albeit adopted only to protect their right to freedom of assembly and discussion within the university – contributed to the decision of the police to open fire. As seen above, in preparation for the seminar, a number of the male students had armed themselves with bricks, tree branches and broken bottles. Using their weapons, they managed to isolate and beat up some policemen before the fatal shootings occurred.<sup>94</sup>

After the conflict that provided the initial catalyst for the Revolution, the civilian opposition to the regime adopted both violent and non-violent strategies. Whilst al-Qurayshi's funeral procession was conducted in a reverent and pacific silence, the crowds that gathered in Abd al-Mun'im square in its immediate aftermath chanted slogans such as 'death to the traitors' and 'revenge ... revenge',<sup>95</sup> and then proceeded to smash up and set fire to nearby police cars.<sup>96</sup> This does not appear to have been simply the work of a violent fringe or a marginalized urban underclass; Ahmad al-Amin Abd al-Rahman, a civil servant in the ministry of agriculture who would soon become a major player in the Professional Front, admits with a degree of contrition that he participated in this vandalism.<sup>97</sup> At the same time, this violence appears to have been fairly spontaneous in nature. Mallasi cites it as evidence of the fact that the Revolution was initially 'lacking in leadership'.<sup>98</sup>

Those who eventually provided the Revolution with its leadership, in both the parties and the unions, never actively encouraged the use of violence against the regime and its agents. They pleaded with the public to stay committed to peaceful means of protest, particularly after the outbreak of the general strike on 24 October. On this day, the SCP's 'Central Bureau for Trade Unions' issued a statement calling on the people to focus on the general strike and avoid perpetrating acts of vandalism.<sup>99</sup> This was followed by another SCP statement on 28 October condemning vandalism and sabotage, and arguing that if these continued they would be exploited by reactionaries to justify a counter-revolutionary coup.<sup>100</sup> This policy was an effective one. The success of the general strike in bringing about the downfall of the regime via peaceful means even forced the British Ambassador to retract his previous cynical statements

regarding the revolution. Originally, he had characterized the events of 22 October as 'widespread but unorganized hooliganism',<sup>101</sup> and shortly afterwards stated that 'The only purposeful direction, apart from actions embarrassing to the function of government, seems to be attacks on liquor shops'.<sup>102</sup> However, after the general strike had succeeded in forcing Abboud to dissolve the SCAF and cabinet, he admitted:

This whole affair has contained remarkable features. A military government has allowed itself to be overthrown by purely civilian opposition.... Civil disobedience on the Gandhian model has been deployed, perhaps for the first time in the Arab or African world, with devastating effect.<sup>103</sup>

Whilst the British Ambassador may have identified these events with the methods adopted by the Indian nationalist movement against British rule, the Sudanese demonstrators found their own specific ways to express pacific protest. A number of those who took to the streets carried branches of the *neem* tree as a symbol of peace.<sup>104</sup>

Nevertheless, it is difficult to deny that acts of vandalism and arson did occur, even if they were exaggerated by Western embassies and the Western media. Windows were smashed at the American embassy and there was an attempt to break into the United States Information Service library.<sup>105</sup> These acts prompted the *Herald Tribune*, in an extraordinary act of national self-referentialism, to produce on 26 October the headline 'Khartoum Situation "serious" in 4 days of anti-U.S. riots'.<sup>106</sup> There were also a variety of other acts of vandalism. They included an assault on a pharmacy whose Syrian owner was believed to have murdered a Sudanese in the period leading up to the Revolution, and another on the premises of the newspaper *al-Ra'i al-'Aam*, which was held by a number of opposition groups to have been sympathetic to the regime.<sup>107</sup>

It is difficult to state objectively whether this violence was sponsored by representatives of the various political parties. Ahmad Ali Baggadi, as a journalist at *al-Ra'i al-'Aam*, insists that the assault on its premises was orchestrated by the SCP to settle grudges with him as a party member who had left the fold.<sup>108</sup> Not surprisingly, this is denied by former communists, who argue that it was simply a spontaneous outbreak of popular anger against a newspaper thought to be supportive of the regime.<sup>109</sup> Such memories are echoes of the position of the SCP at the time, which, although trying to deter acts of vandalism during the revolution itself, in November 1964 sought to excuse them by pointing to the strength of the people's feelings of 'class injustice'.<sup>110</sup> The SCP attitude to revolutionary violence was, therefore, somewhat ambivalent.

The extent to which Sudan's Islamists adopted a pacific stance during the civil protests is also unclear. A good deal of the most destructive rioting exhibited a highly moralistic character. Bars, night clubs and off-licenses were all set on fire.<sup>111</sup> The British Ambassador concluded that attacks on 'liquor shops ... would point to the influence of the Muslim Brotherhood'.<sup>112</sup> Whilst there is no direct evidence that any of the Sudanese political parties associated with the Muslim Brotherhood organized these attacks, it is true that they had campaigned against the opening of new bars and clubs during this period<sup>113</sup> and would have them banned when they had political dominance from the late 1970s onwards. If the individuals who conducted these attacks were not active members of the Brotherhood, they would certainly have sympathized with them. One particular incident demonstrated the manner in which some elements of crowd



behaviour during the Revolution jarred with the more secular slogans adopted by other protesters. Fadil Awadallah, lamenting the role of 'the rabble' in the revolution, recalls:

After the victory of the Revolution a group of rabble (*gauga'*) assaulted a statue embodying the renaissance of the Sudanese woman that had been established by Abboud's government in front of the Omdurman post office, and they brought it to the ground and smashed it, and their only justification for this act was that the woman who was represented life size in the statue was wearing a Sudanese *thob* and that her lower back was revealing indecent features!<sup>114</sup>

This incident was hugely ironic, given that educated women played a significant role in the October Revolution,<sup>115</sup> which would come to be regarded as a high point for women's rights in Sudan following the granting of female suffrage for the first time in the country's history. The acts of this group are a reminder that crowd behaviour is rarely collective, and urban demonstrators during the revolution had a variety of separate agendas. These specific actions recall to some extent the kind of religiously sanctioned mob violence that was practised in the immediate aftermath of the Iranian Revolution.<sup>116</sup> The attacks on bars could be interpreted as a kind of 'revolutionary violence' enacted for the sake of radically restructuring the moral and social order in Sudan – but if this was this case then it was unsuccessful. It would take nearly two more decades for Sudan's Islamists to succeed in their goal of outlawing alcohol consumption in the country.

Incidents of vandalism during the revolution do not seem to have provoked a particularly strong response from either the police or the army. However, there were two further occasions on which the army deployed force to control specific crowd actions which it perceived as more fundamental threats to the existing political and social order. The first occurred at Kober, Khartoum's central prison, in which both political detainees and long-term criminal offenders were incarcerated. In the immediate aftermath of Ibrahim Abboud's dissolution of the cabinet and SCAF on 26 October, a large crowd headed from the palace towards the prison with the intention of releasing all the regime's political prisoners.<sup>117</sup> As they entered it, they were not opposed by either the police or the warder staff, who presumably could have done little to obstruct them given the sheer size of the crowd.<sup>118</sup> Although their avowed intention was only to release political prisoners, a number of their would-be liberators seized water pipes and instead managed to bash down the gates of the section containing the long-term criminal detainees.<sup>119</sup> Upon being set free, these men ran riot, setting fire to the central prison offices and attempting to kill one of the warders.<sup>120</sup> Eventually, an army detachment arrived to back up the Kober governor, who managed to clear the demonstrators out of his prison by directing the soldiers to fire in the air while threatening to kill anyone who approached the prison walls.<sup>121</sup> The significance of this was that the incident revealed the nervousness about any form of anarchic popular anti-regime action not only among the army but also among the intellectuals, students and politicians – despite the fact that it was opposition to the regime that had brought the latter to the prison in the first place. A number of the political prisoners held a meeting in their cells and decided to issue a statement saying they would wait to leave

the prison in a peaceful and legal manner.<sup>122</sup> They were eventually allowed to leave on 28 October, the prison arranging for them to be released surreptitiously so as to avoid attracting the attention of the recidivists.<sup>123</sup> Again, this demonstrates the gulf separating the planning and strategies of Khartoum's political classes from the spontaneous acts of the urban crowds, which many of the Revolution's supporters as well as its opponents saw as potentially anarchic.

In a similar vein, the same officers who were unwilling to use force to keep the November Regime in the palace were prepared to do so to protect the building itself and what it represented. This became clear during the famous 'palace massacre' of 28 October, when the army opened fire on crowds surging towards the building and chanting 'to the palace until victory' (*ila al-qasr hata al-Nasr*). On one level, this demonstration testified to the civilian and largely pacific character of the protests. It was led from the front by Abd al-Majid Imam, who was holding hands with Dr Khalida Zahir, the first Sudanese woman to study at Khartoum University when it was originally Gordon College.<sup>124</sup> However, it also embodied the potential for revolutionary violence, as the chants of the crowds began to demand the trial and execution of members of the SCAF.<sup>125</sup> At one stage, the crowds surrounded the car of Hasan Bashir Nasr's son and would have killed him had one of the senior professionals, Abd al-Halim Muhammad, not intervened.<sup>126</sup> The military, including the Free Officers, appear to have been unsympathetic to these demonstrators. Mahjub Bireir, the Free Officer who had commanded one of the detachments surrounding the palace on 25 October, complains that 'the demonstrators themselves did not know what victory they wanted'.<sup>127</sup> In justification for the subsequent use of firepower against them, retired army officer and military historian al-Shaikh Mustafa insists that they repeatedly ignored warnings not to come any closer to the palace and that if they had been allowed to enter it, there could have been 'a massacre' because of the presence of SCAF officers.<sup>128</sup>

There has been a considerable amount of controversy surrounding the chain of events that actually caused the shooting. Some sources assert that the army opened fire because the crowds had started to wrestle rifles from the soldiers' hands, others that the soldiers mistook the sound of a car exhaust for a weapon being fired, whilst yet others attribute the decision to open fire to the nerviness and inexperience of Zein al-Abdin Abd al-Qadir, the commanding officer.<sup>129</sup> Other accounts claim that the shooting was planned in advance, specifically by Abboud's former strongman Hasan Bashir Nasr – although Thompson disputes this, observing that he was not in the palace but at the military headquarters at the time.<sup>130</sup> Evidence from British embassy sources is telling here. Ian Scott informed the Foreign Office that before the shooting a Sudanese foreign ministry official had instructed him to close the British embassy, which was in close proximity to the palace, because the army was about to open fire on the waves of demonstrators.<sup>131</sup> This would seem to support the notion that members of the November Regime, possibly fearing the kind of gruesome fate suffered by Nuri al-Sa'id and Faisal II after the downfall of the Hashemite regime in Iraq in 1958, ordered the shooting for fear of what might happen if the crowds should enter the palace.

The burst of fire during the 'palace massacre' killed around twenty people and caused the demonstrators to abandon their march towards the palace and focus instead



on ferrying their wounded to hospital. The Sudanese generally treat this incident as being exceptional in a Revolution that otherwise witnessed hardly any loss of life. 'The burst of fire was strange', recalls Ahmad al-Amin Abd al-Rahman, who in spite of his opposition to military rule viewed the generation of army officers from that period as 'very mature, very responsible'.<sup>132</sup> Such use of force by the military would have been shocking to the urban northern Sudanese of the time. This generation had seen the independence struggle being won by largely peaceful means, and the vast majority of urban northerners had witnessed nothing of the fighting with the southern rebels, which had not at this stage spread to the north. Ahmad al-Amin Abd al-Rahman admits that when he saw the corpse of Mutawalli Atabani, who had been transported to Khartoum hospital after the shootings, he vomited at the sight of the latter's brains spread out behind his head.<sup>133</sup>

Thus, although the October Revolution is rightly remembered for the successful adoption of non-violent strategies, it is impossible to characterize it as either a purely 'peaceful' or a purely 'violent' revolution. The very spontaneity with which the revolution occurred and the broad social and political background of its participants makes it particularly difficult to generalize on these grounds – different protagonists had different agendas. Pacific civil protest was mixed with chants to 'hang the generals' and moralistic attacks on drinking establishments. It is also worth remembering that the politicians, professionals and army officers who came to lead the Revolution were reacting to events just as much as they were directing them. They never publicly advocated violence and it is also worth recalling that these professionals, politicians and soldiers, even those who were communists, shared the same privileged social backgrounds as their predecessors in the November Regime and had little interest in encouraging forms of violence that might provoke urban anarchy.

## Religion and nation in the revolution

The moralistic element in the violence that broke out during the October Revolution serves to remind us that it was far from a purely secular event. However, the role of religion in the revolution was incidental rather than planned. As demonstrated above, the sanctity of al-Qurayshi's funeral procession was one of the reasons the police were forced to allow it to proceed. The political parties chose to convene during the Revolution in the tomb of Muhammad Ahmad al-Mahdi because, as one of the holiest sites in Sudanese Islam, it effectively represented a 'building outside of Sudan'<sup>134</sup> into which the military could not intrude. Thus, religious scruples helped to determine the manner in which the insurrection unfolded. However, they did not define the Revolution itself. It is revealing that the least eventful day of Sudan's 'revolutionary week' between 21 and 28 October was Friday, the Islamic holy day. During the Islamic Revolution in Iran, the Friday sermons, or *khutba*, delivered at mosques across the country acted as a vital tool of mobilization.<sup>135</sup> On Friday 23 October 1964, Sadiq al-Mahdi made an 'emotional anti-government speech', but it does not seem that this had the same impact as that made by the lawyers' call for a general strike on the following day.<sup>136</sup> This reminds us that those who participated in the uprising did so as members of the modern, urban

economy – no purpose would have been served by announcing a strike on a religious holiday or day of rest.

Thus it is difficult to characterize the events of October 1964 as a religious revolution, the purpose of which was to change the beliefs and moral norms of society. This at first seems difficult to explain in light of the prominent role of Hasan al-Turabi, who as the political mastermind of the 'Salvation Revolution' a generation later in 1989 would endeavour to do exactly that. Indeed, some of his statements concerning the overthrow of Abboud are surprising in that they reveal an identification with Western history and a fascination with secular Western revolutions. At the time he delivered his famous examination hall speech of 10 September, al-Turabi had recently finished completing a three-year doctorate, heavily imbued with Cartesian positivism and logic, at the Sorbonne in Paris.<sup>137</sup> Although he admits to being involved in pro-Algerian Muslim groups in the French capital, he claims to have developed at this stage a passion for reading about French history, especially the 1789 revolution, which bemused his fellow activists.<sup>138</sup> 'I was probably influenced by the revolution, fraternité, égalité', he told the author, even admitting that the interest he took in politics when he returned to Sudan was 'probably the influence of France'.<sup>139</sup>

It is worth noting here that al-Turabi has a long track record of professing his occidentophilia for the sake of flattering Western audiences; indeed, the ideological gulf between his English-language and Arabic-language statements and writing has been much commented upon.<sup>140</sup> Since his split with al-Bashir in 1999, he has been keen to distance himself from the extreme religious ideology of the 1989–99 period and to portray himself as acceptable to the West. Nevertheless, members of KUSU recall that al-Turabi turned up on 10 September dressed as a 'real Parisian', complete with three-piece suit.<sup>141</sup> Moreover, it is fair to say that in October 1964 he waged his campaign against Abboud's regime in the name of political liberty rather than religious revival. Even after the examination hall speech of 10 September, a number of the students who witnessed it were not aware that he was a member of the Muslim Brotherhood.<sup>142</sup> In this seminar, he famously argued that the difficulties Sudan faced were not caused by the 'southern problem' but by an absence of political freedoms that plagued south and north equally, and thus insisted that democracy and elections were the best solution.<sup>143</sup>

Whilst al-Turabi's actions in 1964 might appear incongruous within the context of his broader political career, a number of Muslim intellectuals throughout history have followed the same practice of citing religion and (political) philosophy in different contexts. The tenth-century philosopher al-Farabi, for instance, maintained that the Prophet Muhammad was essentially a philosopher who had chosen religion as a means to communicate to the masses.<sup>144</sup> Nikkie Keddie argues that the nineteenth-century political activist Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, who was regarded as a pioneer by many Islamists of the twentieth century, followed al-Farabi in preaching a rational and philosophical message to the educated elite and a religious and moralistic one to the masses.<sup>145</sup> Al-Turabi's political and intellectual career is remarkably similar to that of al-Afghani. Just as al-Afghani travelled to Paris and championed the merits of philosophy over those of religion in his debate with the French philosopher Ernest Renan, al-Turabi produced a PhD thesis at the Sorbonne that embraced Cartesian logic

and Cartesian positivism.<sup>146</sup> Just as al-Afghani would later use religion as a rallying call as he attempted to rouse the Indian masses against British colonialism, al-Turabi began to invoke religion when he moved from addressing a student seminar to a broader public audience.

By the time he came to write about the October Revolution on its first anniversary in 1965, al-Turabi had already rediscovered himself as an Islamist politician, having been appointed secretary general of the Muslim Brotherhood's executive bureau and having established the Islamic Charter Front during the previous year. In the article he wrote on the Revolution for the party's newspaper, *al-Mithaq al-Islami*, he subtly re-interpreted it and added a moral and religious agenda. Whilst he acknowledged that the overthrow of Abboud was in the first place 'a popular revolution against a military dictatorship', he also stated that the revolutionaries of October were motivated by a desire to 'cleanse the moral corruption that had spread through the administration in terms of neglect and bribery and [acquisition of] forbidden wealth and which was reflected in public life in the drinking holes and brothels'.<sup>147</sup> It is worth noting in this context that throughout the period of the November Regime, members of the Brotherhood had sought to publicize the sexual depravity of senior members of the junta.<sup>148</sup> Al-Turabi was, as usual, tailoring his message to suit his audience. To an exam hall full of students he talked about political liberty, whereas to a more socially conservative electorate he spoke about public morals.

Jafa'ar Shaikh Idris, a senior member of the Muslim Brotherhood who followed up al-Turabi's article 4 days later, was more explicit. Idris argued that the 'set of values that ignited the Revolution was an Islamic set of values', and that 'the pioneers of that revolution were those who had the strongest faith in the philosophy which that set of values brought'.<sup>149</sup> However, this language was noticeably abstract, which is hardly surprising, for in reality religion played little of a practical role in the revolution. Admittedly there were, as seen above, attacks on bars and brothels, but these appear to have been fairly spontaneous and peripheral incidents. The various students, professionals and political activists who led the revolution did not make *shari'a* a rallying cry – *shari'a* itself was not as central or as emotive an issue in the politics of the Middle Eastern and Islamic world in the 1960s as it was to become in the 1980s.<sup>150</sup> Al-Turabi, even though he would campaign for an Islamic constitution after the 1965 elections, does not appear to have raised the issue when he was a member of the five-man delegation that negotiated the transition to civilian rule with the military following Abboud's dissolution of the SCAF on 26 October.<sup>151</sup> Perhaps he was guided by some kind of Islamist equivalent of Kwame Nkrumah's dictum, 'seek ye first the political kingdom'. Or, to create public awareness of his more specific ideological programme, he found it necessary to address first the more secular concerns of his target audience.<sup>152</sup>

Nevertheless, the events of October 1964 provided the opportunity for the growth among the intelligentsia of an alternative set of beliefs to those associated with both Marxism and Islamism, a set of beliefs that Gallab identifies as akin to a 'civil religion'.<sup>153</sup> According to Gallab, 'this Sudanese civil religion has its own shrines, such as the University of Khartoum, the birthplace of the October Revolution'.<sup>154</sup> It is worth noting that when the lecturers wrote to the government in protest against police intrusion

into the university, they spoke in terms of the violation of the *haram* of the university. The word *haram*, best translated here as 'shrine' or 'sanctuary', has deep Islamic connotations, also suggesting something that is forbidden – in this case, forbidden to enter. The lecturers' protest petition described the university as 'a sanctuary worthy of reverence' (*haram jadid b'il taqdis*), whereas that of the lawyers described it as a '*mihrab muqaddas*' (holy sanctum).<sup>155</sup> This illustrates an interesting concatenation of the secular with the religious by the defiant professionals. Whilst Khartoum University was the home of the 'modern forces', and had been established during a period of British colonial rule, the lawmen defended it using Arabic terms that were highly evocative of the respect for both privacy and knowledge within Islamic ethics.

Gallab further observes that a generation of poets and entertainers has appeared that has become responsible for expressing the values associated with this 'civil religion'. It includes Muhammad al-Makki Ibrahim, Fadl Allah Muhammad, Hashim Sidiq, Mahjub Sharif, Muhammad Wardi, 'Abd al-Karim al-Kabli and Muhammad al-Amin.<sup>156</sup> Again, it is important to understand that Gallab terms this a *Sudanese* civil religion and a 'national discourse'.<sup>157</sup> Mahjub Sharif, for instance, articulated his poems about the October Revolution in the northern riverain dialect of Sudanese Arabic spoken by the populations, which formed the base of the nationalist movement.<sup>158</sup>

Participants often saw the 1964 Revolution as a kind of continuation of the independence struggle. One student activist recalls that the public saw in their military rulers 'another image of the colonizer', observing that the generals wore exactly the same uniforms and even the same caps as their colonial predecessors!<sup>159</sup> In this context, it is important to remember that the Sudanese independence movement had achieved its initial goal of formal territorial independence in 1956 with relative ease, due largely to the willingness of the British to surrender Sudan as a bargaining chip in negotiations with Egypt over the Suez Canal.<sup>160</sup> The nationalist movement, such as it was, had not been forced to fight for its goals in the same way as the nationalists in countries like India, Algeria or Vietnam. In a way the events of October 1964 offered Sudan the opportunity for a 'real' independence struggle, if not against the British, then against the soldiers they had trained in the colonial army. The October Revolution succeeded, albeit briefly, in unifying disparate political forces just as national independence struggles did in other non-Western nations during this period.

Nationalist ideals were at the core of the Revolution. Although both the Muslim Brotherhood and the Communist Party influenced events during October 1964, the vast majority of the urban population was still more attached to the ideal of national independence than it was to Islamist or Marxist philosophies. In Port Sudan, the one demonstrator who was killed was wrapped in the national flag by his fellow protesters.<sup>161</sup> According to Mahgub, the reason that the crowds burnt the flag at the Egyptian embassy was their fury at the assertion made by the Egyptian press that the uprising in Khartoum was an attempt to emulate Nasser's revolution.<sup>162</sup> Even leftist or rightist ideologues are remembered for their role as prominent Sudanese rather than prominent Islamists or communists. For instance, Muhammad Shaikh al-Arab, in commemorating these events, bundles together Babikir Karrar and Abd al-Khalig Mahgub – a Muslim Brother and a Marxist, respectively – as 'national' figures for their roles during the uprising.<sup>163</sup>



Sudanese accounts of the October Revolution – including those provided by the SCP – often define it as link in a chain of ‘great national events,’ beginning with the battles waged by the Ja’ali ruler Makk Nimr against the Turco-Egyptian colonizers of the 1820s, from Muhammad Ahmad al-Mahdi’s successful revolt against the Turco-Egyptian state in 1885, to Ali Abd al-Latif’s attempted revolt against British colonialism in 1924, to the various campaigns for independence waged by the political parties of the 1940s and 1950s.<sup>164</sup> Whilst many of the leaders of the civilian insurrection represented a younger generation of politicians, they were often related to past nationalists. For instance, Shawgi Mallasi, the man who some claim proposed the general strike on 22 October, was the nephew of one of the leading members of Ali Abd al-Latif’s White Flag League, Ali Mallasi.<sup>165</sup> The political parties participating in the October Revolution were largely the same as those that had been politically active during the independence campaigns – the NUP, the Umma Party, the Muslim Brotherhood and the SCP.

There is perhaps a clue here as to the reason why civilian pro-democracy protests were able to succeed in Sudan while they failed elsewhere in the Middle East. In countries such as Iraq, Syria and Egypt, the principle of parliamentary democracy had been discredited in the period between the 1920s and 1950s, when the European imperial powers had manipulated local politics to ensure that parties linked to the major rural landholding classes won the elections or that more populist parties were sidelined in favour of pro-Western monarchs.<sup>166</sup> In Sudan, the British colonizers had permitted full parliamentary democracy only in 1953, 3 years before independence. Whilst in the wider Middle Eastern region, populist military autocrats such as Nasser and Qasim were seen as the men who had liberated their countries from the grasp of European imperialism with coups that led to significant wealth redistribution, in Sudan it was a parliamentary politician, Isma’il al-Azhari, who was ‘the father of independence’ (*Abu’l Istiqlal*). Al-Azhari, who was at the forefront of the funeral procession on 22 October, was an important symbolic figure. Nationalism and liberal democracy were thus more firmly bound together in the mind of Sudan’s protesters.

Of course, the fact that its protagonists represented the October Revolution as the latest link in a chain of ‘national’ events leads one to question how ‘revolutionary’ it actually was – since genuine revolutions are understood to represent a radical break with the past and the introduction of a new set of norms.<sup>167</sup> Moreover, it illustrates the fact that the October Revolution shared the same inherent limitations as Sudanese nationalism itself – with the arguable exception of the Mahdist revolt, the majority of these events had their epicentre within the riverain north of the country.

### Social composition of the popular movement

Although the October Revolution began as a student movement, it spread rapidly to all major sectors of the urban population. Commentators on the event are fond of stating that it was not any given political party but ‘the people’ who brought it about.<sup>168</sup> If we define ‘the people’ as what was at this time the relatively socially and culturally homogenous population of Khartoum, this is in many regards true. As soon



as al-Qurayshi was shot, news of what had happened was spread throughout the capital by taxi drivers, by people returning from the centre informing their neighbours in the suburbs and by gossip in bars, so that citizens from all over Khartoum came to witness the scene at the hospital that evening.<sup>169</sup> It seems that the news travelled very quickly and without particular assistance from any of the political parties. The poet Muhammad Abd al-Hayy recalls that he first found out about the shooting at 2 o'clock on the morning of 22 October when he saw a drunk who was chanting 'there is no government!' (*hukuma ma fi*).<sup>170</sup>

The number of those who attended al-Qurayshi's funeral ceremony has been estimated at 30,000. Among these, the most prominent groups were the students and secondary school pupils, who had been in close contact with their seniors at the university before the seminar of 21 October.<sup>171</sup> However, Khartoum's professional classes and large groups of urban workers also attended this procession.<sup>172</sup> The urban labourers and government employees also made the most significant contribution towards the general strike. The British Ambassador acknowledged this on 25 October, reporting that 'the strike call seems to be largely successful today and includes government offices and banks', with hospital staff keeping only emergency services running.<sup>173</sup> The next day he added that although some banks and businesses had re-opened, factories in Khartoum North remained closed and electricity was being provided only because of the efforts of expatriate workers.<sup>174</sup>

Casualty lists can provide a useful index for the social composition of urban demonstrations. On the day after the army opened fire on the crowd at the palace on 28 October, *al-Sudan al-Jadid* provided a breakdown of the names and occupational backgrounds of the fifteen individuals who had perished by that point (the number would later increase). These were all male and comprised university students, secondary school pupils, employees of Sudan Airways and locally engaged workers at the Japanese textile factory.<sup>175</sup> Labourers and students had provided the uprising with its principal foot soldiers. Thus, whilst 'the people' made the October Revolution, it was specifically those among them – for the most part male – who were integrated within the central urban economy. Almost all of those who died had northern, Arabic names – with one exception, Mabior Shol, a labourer at Khartoum University, who, like other southerners on campus that night, got involved in the fighting with the police.<sup>176</sup>

Although the vast majority of casualties were male, women also contributed to the Revolution from the start. Before the seminar on 21 October, posters in the name of the female students declaring that they would be prepared to 'sacrifice their lives' were attached to walls in Khartoum.<sup>177</sup> During the clashes between students and police at the university on 21 October, the female students supported the men by singing *zagharids*, the shrill ululations that women in northern Sudan usually released to celebrate weddings or other notable occasions.<sup>178</sup> One male student participant later argued that the students would not have continued their fight against the police had it not been for the particularly moving *zagharid* chanted by one female student.<sup>179</sup> Secondary school girls also participated in large numbers in Khartoum and elsewhere.<sup>180</sup> The Revolution also had one female martyr, Sayyid Bakhita Mubarak, who was shot whilst demonstrating alongside her children and grandchildren.<sup>181</sup>

Recent scholarship has observed that women's participation in Middle Eastern protest had a radicalizing effect due to the willingness of female protesters to use mockery and insult as tactics and the unwillingness of the authorities to break up women's protests due to social mores that militate against physically dispersing them.<sup>182</sup> This was most visible during the demonstration of 24 October, in which female lecturers, doctors and lawyers joined their professional counterparts in presenting a memorandum to the palace.<sup>183</sup> Led by Fatima Ahmad Ibrahim, an SCP member who would later become Sudan's first female MP, they helped to deter the military from taking action against the demonstrators by standing at the forefront of the crowds and humiliating the soldiers with chants of 'go back to the barracks, you girls'.<sup>184</sup> Female participation in the protests thus enabled women to perform in a wide range of gender roles. On one level, their agency was determined by a narrowly defined and socially conservative understanding of femininity – exhorting the male students to acts of bravery, and shaming the soldiers by employing a rigid understanding of gender to stigmatize them (calling them cowards by comparing them to girls). On another level, women participated as economically empowered, politically savvy professionals and identified themselves as equal with men by declaring their willingness to share in their sacrifice.

Whilst there was broad urban participation in the revolution, its leadership was socially narrow, being limited to the urban professionals and leaders of Khartoum's mainstream political parties. As mentioned above, the most significant protest petitions handed to the government were those presented by the lawyers, judges, lecturers and doctors; the call for the general strike was initiated by a lawyer, Abdin Isma'il. The fact that the alliance of professional, trade and labour unions was termed the 'Professional Front', further underlined the dominance within the anti-regime movement of a professional class socially distinct from regular labourers (see Chapter 4). The civilian team delegated to negotiate the establishment of the transitional government comprised two professional representatives and three representatives of the mainstream political parties. These included Abdin Isma'il, as chairman of the Bar Association; Hasan al-Turabi, who although a university lecturer was seen by some as representing the Muslim Brotherhood; Mubarak Zarroug and Ahmad Sayyid Hamid for the Unionists; and al-Sadiq al-Mahdi for the Umma Party.<sup>185</sup>

## The revolution outside Khartoum

Hasan al-Turabi is fond of claiming that the October Revolution was 'a capital affair'.<sup>186</sup> This is perhaps a convenient argument, since his own organization, the Muslim Brotherhood, still had a very narrow political base at this time, built mainly on the support of intellectuals and students located within Khartoum; it perhaps also demonstrates the fact that he himself featured most prominently in the capital. The SCP, which had a much wider presence in Khartoum's immediate periphery, took a different view, maintaining at party meetings that the regions made a significant contribution to the Revolution in the capital.<sup>187</sup> It is undeniable that the civil protests *did* spread outside Khartoum and across the whole northern part of the country. However, it is also true

that wherever the demonstrations began outside Khartoum, they were a reaction to news from the capital, rather than a response to regional events.

It seems that although news spread to the regions relatively quickly – the communications network linking the various provincial secondary schools to those in the capital helped here<sup>188</sup> – this did not occur speedily enough for the provincial insurrections to feedback significantly into those of the capital. In Shendi, Sinnar and al-Fashir, secondary school students began demonstrating on 22 and 23 October, whereas both Dueim and Shendi were able to respond to the call for the general strike on the day it occurred, 24 October.<sup>189</sup> The uprising took longer to travel to the major provincial towns of the east and west. In Nyala, a major city in the western province of Darfur, the demonstrations did not begin until 25 October.<sup>190</sup> In Port Sudan, the principal town of the east, secondary school pupils began demonstrating on 24 October, but it was not until 3 days later that its population responded to the call for a general strike.<sup>191</sup>

Bechtold, echoing the communist narrative to some extent, claims that as the Revolution unfolded in Khartoum, 'trucks and trainloads of sympathizers began to arrive from provincial towns'.<sup>192</sup> However, the importance of this provincial support should not be exaggerated. As noted above, it took the protesters in Khartoum a mere 5 days to force the regime to begin making concessions and by the time the provincial towns had started to organize their own support for the capital, events had already taken their course. Whilst the NUP politician Muhammad Jabara Awad was able to bring a trainload of Beja volunteers from the eastern city of Kassala, by the time they arrived Abboud had already dissolved the government. Accordingly, members of the United National Front thanked the new arrivals but informed them they would not be needed.<sup>193</sup> Similarly, in Wad Madani and Sinnar, the local revolutionary fronts made plans to send truckloads of citizens to the capital but abandoned them after the UNF informed them that such assistance was not necessary.<sup>194</sup> In towns that were very close to Khartoum, such as Hassaheissa, citizens began to travel to the capital in their own private cars.<sup>195</sup> But, again, it seems that their practical input was limited.

The uprisings in the provinces were not marked by any particularly significant regional agenda. For the most part, the demonstrators in the provincial towns adopted the same slogans as those in Khartoum – in Hassaheissa, they cried 'hang the generals'; in al-Fashir, 'soldiers go back to the barracks'; and in Nyala, the chant was 'we will not forget you o Qurayshi'.<sup>196</sup> In Hassaheissa, crowds carried photographs of al-Qurayshi, presumably obtained from nearby Khartoum, whilst in al-Ubayyid, prayers were offered for him in the central mosque at the Friday congregation on 23 October, and in Shendi, demonstrators carried a mock funeral bier made up to look the same as the one that had borne the martyr.<sup>197</sup> In Nyala, a student called Mahgub Sha'rani composed a *qasida* (a poem written in classical style) to commemorate al-Qurayshi, which he read out in the town's main square.<sup>198</sup> Even in the relatively remote western province of Darfur, then, the protests reproduced the Arabophone nationalism of the riverain centre.

Although they did not determine the ultimate course of the Revolution, the protesters in the provincial towns did fight their own battles and obtain their own martyrs. After the general strike spread to al-Fashir, the provincial capital of Darfur,

tensions between the military and the urban population peaked on 29 October as the local army regiment opened fire on a mass demonstration. This provided the town with two martyrs, Salih Abdallah and Ahmad al-Amin.<sup>199</sup> Al-Ubayyid also had its own martyr, Abbas al-Tijani, who was killed in clashes with the police, as did Port Sudan with Muhammad Khalifa. In each of these towns, there were elaborate funeral processions for the martyrs, akin to those held to mark the death of al-Qurayshi in Khartoum.<sup>200</sup>

The social composition of the provincial demonstrations was broadly similar to that of those that took place in Khartoum. Again, casualty lists offer a useful index. In al-Fashir, the two people killed following the 29 October demonstration were a cobbler and a student at the local scientific institute (*ma'ahad ilmi*). The twenty-three people who were injured included a number of market traders and urban labourers, in addition to a painter, a fishmonger, a barber, a carpenter, a forestry worker, a supervisor in the Public Works Department, a hospital driver, an employee of Bank Egypt, two council workers, a primary and a secondary school pupil, as well as a young child.<sup>201</sup> In other words, it was those who were most integrated into the central urban economy that provided the provincial uprisings with their leaders.

It was rare that provincial support for the Revolution was expressed on an ethnic basis. On 29 October, a demonstration was conducted in the name of the Halawiyin in Hassaheissa, but this is the only such example discovered so far by the author in media coverage of the provincial protests.<sup>202</sup> After the end of civil disobedience was announced in Nyala, there was a large public meeting in the main square at which it was reported that 'the tribes participated ... through their tribal games'.<sup>203</sup> However, this appears to have been very much a ceremonial affair and in any case took place after the event. The rural population of Darfur seems to have been little touched by the urban insurrection. Dr Musa Jalil, who witnessed it as a school pupil in Kutum, recalls that the demonstrations were confined to the town.<sup>204</sup> There seems to have been more social participation at the village level near riverain urban centres such as Dueim and Wad Madani, where the social gulf between town and countryside was less significant.<sup>205</sup> In Garrasa, al-Qurayshi's home village, the inhabitants of Dueim and nearby villages such as Ni'ama, Geteina and Wadi Sheila came to witness his burial, and then participated in an anti-government procession.<sup>206</sup> This probably reflected the fact that the rural areas of riverain Sudan provided more of a catchment area for the central secondary schools and universities than the more peripheral rural regions of the country.

The leaders of the provincial uprisings also had social backgrounds similar to those of the Revolution in Khartoum. Bodies termed either the 'national front' or the 'professional front' were established in the provinces and in most cases appear to have been led by urban professionals. In Rufa'a, the local body was led by the doctor and future leader of the 1985 National Alliance and subsequent prime minister Jizouli Dafa'allah; in Shendi, by Dr Abdallah Sulayman; in Nyala, by Shakir Siraj, later a member of the Central Committee of the Doctors' Union; and in Sinnar, by the judge Abd al-Aziz Shiddu.<sup>207</sup> In Port Sudan, it was Dr Harith, the chief doctor at Port Sudan Hospital, who delivered the most memorable speeches.<sup>208</sup> At the same time, in the riverain town of Wad Madani, the local protest movement was driven by the Gezira



'Tenants' Union, whose pro-communist president al-Amin Muhammad al-Amin was instrumental in the establishment of a 'Conference of Popular Organizations' (*mu'atamar al-munazzamat al-jamahiriyya*).<sup>209</sup>

However, in general the provincial uprisings were driven by the same elite social forces that guided the insurrection in Khartoum. They did not express regional agendas and were not led by regional political parties. These parties – such as the Darfur Renaissance Front of Ahmad Diraige – would appear in the aftermath of the Revolution, not during it. Nevertheless, what can be said is that the Revolution directly helped to inspire regionalist movements to challenge central authority. As the Darfuri historian Mahgub Abd al-Rahman al-Zein writes, 'the participation of the people of Darfur in the October Revolution and their giving of two martyrs had a far-reaching effect on the political development of the people of Darfur, and this was in addition to the appearance of a new language in political evenings organized by various associations, especially the Darfur Renaissance Front.'<sup>210</sup> One of the earliest acts of the Darfur Renaissance Front's branch in Nyala was the presentation in *al-Kurdufan* of a protest memorandum demanding that action be taken against both the *Miralai* who ordered the 29 October shootings in al-Fashir and the military governor of Darfur.<sup>211</sup> Many of the other regionalist organizations empowered by the October Revolution identified with its goals. These included the Beja Congress, which had grown frustrated with the Abboud Regime's decision to allow the Nubian settlement of Khash al-Girba. The General Union of the Nuba Mountains also published manifestos that concluded with the declaration 'Long Live the October Revolution'.<sup>212</sup>

What the provincial uprisings illustrated was that the events of October 1964 did represent a genuinely national revolution, albeit within a nation that did not encompass the full geographic extent of the state with which it was identified.

## Conclusion

The centrality of Hasan al-Turabi's speech to the set of events that ignited the October Revolution poses a challenge to analysts seeking to compare Sudan in 1964 to Egypt and Tunisia in 2011. How could a man who would later become the architect of the attempt to create an Islamic state in Sudan also be the engineer of an uprising that espoused universalist and non-religious ideals? To resolve this apparent paradox, we must accept that there is no rigid dichotomy between 'Islamist' and 'secularist' forms of mobilization. It is important to recognize that the forms of civil protest witnessed in Sudan were driven by secular civilian movements and organized in secular spaces, and that, as in 2011, the regime was overthrown by purely pacific civil disobedience. The notion of a purely peaceful revolution is, of course, somewhat utopian. There was a considerable amount of vandalism, and the 21 October seminar would not have been as significant as it turned out to be, had students not been willing to confront the police with improvised weapons. Nevertheless, such acts of violence as did occur did not play a decisive role in bringing about the downfall of the regime.



In a sense, the fact that the October Revolution was at least outwardly secular rather than religious in character is nothing surprising, since it occurred in the era before secular Arab nationalism had been discredited by Nasser's defeat in the six-day war of 1967. Even though there was no one 'nationalist' party in Sudan, nationalism proved to be particularly cohesive for the majority of the protagonists in October 1964, who interpreted the fight against Abboud as a kind of revivification of the independence struggle. The October Revolution can be seen as a kind of microcosm of the wider Sudanese nationalist project – it was the brainchild of an urban elite inhabiting the riverain centres of Sudanese society, and excluded large sections of the population in spite of its pretensions to possess universal appeal. The uprising in the capital may have exported itself to the provinces, but this was very much a one-way process, dominated by the same elite social groups that had spearheaded the anti-regime campaign in the capital.

The Revolution did not occur in a political vacuum. As will be seen in Chapter 3, the communists in the long run and the Muslim Brotherhood in the short term had to some extent laid the ground for what would eventually transpire. Nevertheless, the events of 21–26 October were still highly spontaneous in nature and relied upon a series of crucial turning points without the occurrence of which the anti-regime movement might never have generated a significant impetus. They included the decision of the Khartoum University students to stay on and fight the police after the KUSU executive committee had retired, and the decision of al-Qurayshi's uncle to give his eventual sanction to the funeral procession. The civilian uprising was not, as al-Turabi argued, a 'comprehensive movement ... which aimed to break down the existing system of life'. It hinged upon a series of unpredictable yet interrelated contingent events and rational choices made by key players at crucial junctures. There was, thus, no air of inevitability surrounding the October Revolution of 1964 – and this marked it as distinct from the next great civilian insurrection, the April *Intifada* of 1985.

## The 1985 *Intifada*: Nimeiri's Self-Destruction?

Jizouli Dafa'allah, the controversial leader of the National Alliance, remarks that by the time the *Intifada* occurred in 1985, the country was 'ripe for change'.<sup>1</sup> This provides a point of comparison with its historic predecessor. Even if we concede the argument that the political parties had to some extent planned the 1964 October Revolution, the downfall of Ibrahim Abboud had never seemed inevitable. In 1985, the macrosocial factors undermining the regime's legitimacy and motivating popular protest were far more significant. The regime faced a far more structural series of crises, brought on by corruption, economic malfeasance, regional recession, famine and impoverishment. Some analysts thus attribute Nimeiri's ouster to the series of austerity measures introduced by the regime directly before the protests. However, economic monocausalism risks neglecting the extent to which Nimeiri's failed political strategies contributed to his decline. Like most African and Middle Eastern dictators, the Sudanese president depended on a series of patron-client networks to legitimate his rule, giving senior generals, bureaucrats and, later on, members of the re-legalized opposition parties, an incentive to help preserve his regime.<sup>2</sup> Towards the end of his regime – partly as a result of his own deteriorating mental health – Nimeiri's patronage tactics became more and more rash and he moved towards an increasingly personalistic style of rule that left him bereft of allies. It is necessary to situate Sudan's second civilian uprising within the context of the president's failure to manage a system of 'liberalized autocracy' and the tenacity of both party and union-based opposition. In doing so, we can explain why an apparently secular uprising was able to succeed at a time when political Islam was an increasingly hegemonic ideology in the region.

### The prelude to the *Intifada*: The emergence of the May Regime

The coup conducted by the Free Officer movement in 1969 was portrayed by its instigators as the child of the October Revolution. It might more accurately be said that it was born out of its failures. The parliamentary regime established by the post-revolutionary elections of 1965 had failed to satisfy the aspirations of the urban intellectuals who had led the uprising. It proved itself incapable of achieving peace in the south; indeed, the civil war intensified in the early months of the second democracy.<sup>3</sup> It did not implement any particularly progressive political strategies, the issue of

policy making being overshadowed by the intense personal competition between major northern politicians such as Isma'il al-Azhari, Muhammad Ahmad Mahgub and Sadiq al-Mahdi.<sup>4</sup> The parliamentary government also abandoned the Revolution's commitment to political liberalism when it outlawed the Sudan Communist Party in December 1965, causing the Chief Justice Babikir Awadallah, one of the heroes of October, to resign in protest.<sup>5</sup>

The prohibition of the SCP by a democratically elected regime convinced many within the party that it was impossible for liberal democracy to co-exist with 'progressive' politics. One faction within the party, led by Ahmad Sulayman, suggested that it should support a coup led by the 'Free Officer' movement in the army.<sup>6</sup> However, the advocates of a *putsch* were unable to obtain majority support for their position within the Central Committee.<sup>7</sup> The coup plotters among the Free Officers also formed a narrow minority within the leadership of their organization, and their proposals for establishing a new government at gunpoint were voted down 7-6 in a meeting of senior representatives of the movement.<sup>8</sup> Regardless, the six members who agreed to the plan decided to go ahead with it, in spite of the continuing opposition of the SCP leadership.<sup>9</sup>

These officers executed their bloodless coup on 25 May 1969.<sup>10</sup> Political parties were banned, leading politicians arrested and senior army officers put on pension.<sup>11</sup> The new regime made it clear from the outset that it saw itself as the guardian of the radical legacy of October. It broadcast a revolutionary manifesto declaring that power would be put into 'the hands of workers, peasants, soldiers, intellectuals and national capitalists who are not associated with imperialism'.<sup>12</sup> However, Jafar Nimeiri, who was elected by the Free Officers to head the new regime's Revolutionary Command Council, was no ideologue. According to Mansour Khalid, he was nominated for this position by Faruq Hamdallah precisely because his lack of firm political convictions made him a candidate acceptable to all.<sup>13</sup> What he did not lack, as the coming years would show, was political pragmatism and a firm desire to monopolize power.

In a sense, the regime's claim that it embodied the political legacy of the October Revolution was justified – at least, if we associate its legacy with the urban radicals who formed the Professional Front. Indeed, a number of former members of the Professional Front joined the civilian cabinet established by Nimeiri the day after the coup.<sup>14</sup> Babikir Awadallah took the post of prime minister.<sup>15</sup> In 1970, Nimeiri answered the demands of the Revolution's urban radicals by abolishing the Native Administration. He also achieved what both the revolutionaries of October and the parliamentary politicians of the second democratic regime had failed to do, which was to bring peace between north and south. In 1972, he signed the Addis Ababa agreement with the south Sudan Liberation Movement, bringing an end to a 17-year conflict and granting regional autonomy to the south.<sup>16</sup>

Although Nimeiri abandoned October's commitment to multiparty politics in 1972 when he established the Sudan Socialist Union to act as the sole political party within the country, he did wink at the legacy of the Professional Front by embracing the principle of sectoral representation for professional and labour groups within this one-party system. The new regime assigned seats in the 'People's Assembly' to farmers, veterinarians and individuals from a whole range of relatively minor professions.<sup>17</sup>

One of the reasons that his regime survived far longer than Abboud's was that it reproduced the 'corporatist' strategies being pursued by other radical Arab republics such as Egypt, Syria and Iraq during the same period. His state effectively used its power of patronage to 'bureaucratize' associational life and integrate workers' and professional bodies within itself.<sup>18</sup> In this sense, Nimeiri's government was fulfilling the legacy of October, although perhaps not in the manner its architects would have intended.

The limits to the radicalism of the new regime had already become dramatically evident through the course of late 1970 and 1971. In November 1970, Nimeiri fired three pro-communist members of the RCC, and then began to make a number of vituperative public attacks on the SCP, exhorting the public to 'destroy the communist movement'.<sup>19</sup> Under the leadership of Hashim al-Atta, the communist sympathizers dismissed from the RCC responded by staging a coup of their own on 19 July 1971, briefly imprisoning Nimeiri and establishing a new executive body with firm links to the SCP.<sup>20</sup> The new government barely survived past the moment of its inception: on 22 July 1971, Nimeiri staged a counter-coup, executing al-Atta and his fellow *putschists*.<sup>21</sup> The returning president also hanged a number of senior SCP figures whom he accused of participation in the attempted takeover, including Abd al-Khaliq Mahgub and Shafi' Ahmad al-Shaikh.<sup>22</sup> The 1971 confrontation and its aftermath are often identified as a watershed in political violence in Sudan. It was the first time that a post-colonial Sudanese government had executed civilians for political opposition to the regime. The visceral and reckless nature of some of the killings was also something new. The police officer who arrested Hashim al-Atta later admitted that he was executed by a *Shawish* who was 'known to be a killer and responsible for many moral crimes'. This *Shawish* opened fire on the would-be president with such sustained ferocity that his body was torn to pieces by the bullets, and the soldiers responsible for removing his corpse struggled to carry it away.<sup>23</sup> The fact that state violence had by the 1970s become so banal goes some way to explaining why it took so long for the legacy of October to be repeated.

In spite of Nimeiri's bloody rift with the SCP, his regime maintained its moderate socialist outlook, and its violence was thus initially directed against the political right. Before 1971, Nimeiri had clashed violently with the *Ansar* at Aba Island in 1970, killing – according to one estimate – over 12,000 *Ansaris* during his aerial bombardment and subsequent invasion of the Mahdi's historic residence.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, after 1971 the most serious threats to Nimeiri were also posed by the religious right. The Umma Party, DUP and ICI collaborated to form a 'National Front'. This 'National Front' provoked student unrest in September 1973 in an unsuccessful attempt to revive the legacy of the 21 October seminar, and attempted to overthrow the president militarily in 1976 with Libyan support.<sup>25</sup> Thus it is worth remembering that although Nimeiri's coup empowered one group of Octoberists, another faction lost out. Both the Imam al-Hadi al-Mahdi, who had issued a famous memorandum condemning al-Qurayshi's killing, and the Muslim Brother lecturer Muhammad Salih Umar, who had been prominent in the seminars leading up to the University Incident, were killed in the struggles against Nimeiri in 1970. This in itself reminds us just how divided the legacy of the October Revolution was.



## The economic roots of the uprising

While the May Regime claimed to be preserving the radical legacy of October 1964, from the late 1970s onwards its economic malfeasance and inability to provide basic services began to make this assertion increasingly tenuous. In the early to mid-1980s, economic grievances were considerably more widespread and substantial than they had been in 1964. It is important to understand that this was a factor in the buildup to the 1985 uprising, since it weakens the claim that it was spontaneous in nature. The deteriorating economic situation was partly a result of wider global factors, such as the oil price rises of the 1970s, the slumps in demand for Sudan's raw materials and the pressure applied by the International Monetary Fund to force Middle Eastern and African states to practise economic austerity. However, in Sudan it was also a result of inefficient and corruptly managed economic planning. The mistakes made by the May Regime resembled the flawed development strategies of governments elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa at this time. Its economic planners focused too heavily on oversized and overambitious development projects without guaranteeing access to sufficient capital to see them through, while ignoring existing agricultural projects that would have helped keep the economy afloat.<sup>26</sup>

Corruption was a significant factor in the mismanagement of Sudan's economy at this time. Senior government officials allocated funding for development projects based on calculations not of their potential benefit to the national economy but the individual rewards that would accrue to themselves as managers of these projects.<sup>27</sup> The most notorious of all these officials was Bahieddin Idris, a disgraced former zoology lecturer whom Nimeiri appointed as his 'Minister for Special Affairs'.<sup>28</sup> Idris used his position to bypass both his fellow ministers and the Bank of Sudan in arranging contracts with international companies and development corporations which earned significant financial kickbacks for himself but left the Sudanese economy heavily in debt.<sup>29</sup> He also helped to develop Nimeiri's relationship with the notorious Saudi businessman Adnan Khashoggi, to whom the president conceded the rights to half the country's mineral resources and oil reserves in October 1984.<sup>30</sup>

Sudan's external debt climbed from 3 billion US dollars in 1981 to 7 billion in 1984.<sup>31</sup> As a result, the country became a hostage to the International Monetary Fund, which dictated that its government cut back on public spending, reduce subsidies on basic foodstuffs and orient the economy towards producing export goods.<sup>32</sup> The regime began to apply these measures in 1979 and continued to implement them with increasing intensity, provoking a series of urban riots.<sup>33</sup> The economic cutbacks also severely hampered its capacity to deal with the next crisis – the series of drought-induced famines that broke out in the western, eastern and southern peripheries of the country between 1983 and 1985.<sup>34</sup> Nimeiri himself refused to acknowledge that the famine was even occurring. Thousands died of starvation and thousands more sought refuge in Khartoum, prompting the president to have his security organs launch *kashas* ('sweeps') to round up these starving men and ferry them back into the famine-stricken rural areas.<sup>35</sup>

Given that the economic situation had deteriorated sharply before the *Intifada*, it would seem reasonable to conclude that it was this that sparked the protests which

led to the ultimate downfall of the regime. The crisis grew even more severe in the early months of 1985 as Nimeiri announced a 75 per cent increase in petrol prices.<sup>36</sup> Long queues emerged at petrol stations, and citizens of Khartoum recall being forced to sleep there overnight just to be able to fill up their cars.<sup>37</sup> In the days immediately preceding the outbreak of the uprising on 26 March 1985, Nimeiri announced further increases in the prices of bread and sugar.<sup>38</sup> The demonstrators tore up currency notes bearing the president's face, reflecting their disgruntlement at the hyperinflation and the government's agreement with the IMF to devalue the Sudanese pound.<sup>39</sup> Some of the slogans they chanted had a specifically economic theme, including 'the World Bank will not rule us' (*lan yahkumna al-bank al-dawli*), and 'One hundred per cent of our hungry people are against Nimeiri' (*mia-mia sha'abna ja'aa didda Nimeiri*).<sup>40</sup> Six days after the downfall of Nimeiri, a newly freed journalist concluded that the *Intifada* was 'not manufactured by any specific grouping or union ... it was a result of the suffering which citizens in different social and economic and cultural sectors were exposed to, and represented the difficulty of gaining the daily necessities of life and bread.'<sup>41</sup> The fact that the price hikes were introduced just before the *Intifada* suggests that they were one of its direct causes.

Nevertheless, although the corruption of the regime and the deteriorating economic situation provided the essential background to the *Intifada*, these factors alone cannot explain Nimeiri's downfall. Economic protests with very similar causes had broken out at the same time in Tunisia, Algeria, Egypt, Morocco and Jordan without the governments there being unseated.<sup>42</sup> Admittedly, famine was not a factor in these countries, but then the groups most affected by the famine – the marginalized populations of the east, south and west – were not those with the power to decide the fate of the regime. As will be seen below, famine migrants from Sudan's rural peripheries played a noticeable, but not a decisive, role in the *Intifada*. To fully understand the causes of Nimeiri's downfall, it is necessary to understand his response to the economic crisis and the reason for his failure as a ruler to implement political strategies that would guarantee his survival.

## Nimeiri's malaise and the breakdown of the political order

On 25 March, the day before the popular uprising broke out, the national radio station broadcast a statement by Nimeiri announcing that the people would have to deal with the economic crisis by cutting down on 'frivolous consumption' and cycling rather than driving to work.<sup>43</sup> The popular furore that this produced and its significance in provoking the popular uprising highlight two major factors in Nimeiri's political behaviour that aggravated the economic crisis and led to the downfall of his regime. First, as has often been observed, it revealed his increasingly irrational outlook and loss of popular touch. However, the president's former security officials claim he had made these statements to the SSU without ever having intended them for public consumption, and suggest that it was probably the minister of information Ali Shummo who arranged for them to be broadcast. They attribute this to the fact that Shummo, who would later become a minister under the 'Salvation' regime, was a likely Islamic Movement sympathizer aggrieved by Nimeiri's move to arrest

the senior leaders of the Islamic Charter Front 2 weeks earlier. The broadcast was thus indicative of the other major factor in Nimeiri's decline – the breakdown of his relationship with all his potential political allies.<sup>44</sup> It will be shown here that his increasingly inept political management played an even more critical role in his demise than the deteriorating economic situation.

This breakdown occurred in the context of Nimeiri's increasing paranoia and personalistic style of rule. He increasingly used arbitrary measures against both allies and opponents, with the distinction between these two categories becoming increasingly blurred. This in itself did not herald his imminent demise. Dictators in Africa and elsewhere often switch allegiances and use ruthless methods against former henchmen or supporters as part of a calculated survival strategy. As seen above, Nimeiri was himself a consummate ideological chameleon during the early years of his rule, allying with the SCP in 1969, the southern regionalists in 1972 and, eventually, the ICF and the other right-wing parties in 1977.<sup>45</sup> However, he lost his survival nous in the later years of his period in power, and this contributed significantly to the collapse of the May Regime. He centred all political power in his own person, and then self-destructed.

To comprehend why this happened, we must appreciate the state of the president's health. As early as 1978, Nimeiri had begun displaying symptoms of severe physical and neurological stress, often entering states of temporary dementia or physical collapse.<sup>46</sup> At one point this occurred on national television.<sup>47</sup> In 1979, his American doctors diagnosed a severe blood clot in one of his arteries, which was preventing blood from flowing freely to his brain.<sup>48</sup> He was forced to return to America for further treatment in 1980 following a minor stroke, prompting speculation in diplomatic and governmental circles that his deputy and army chief-of-staff Abd al-Majid Hamid al-Khalil would be called in to replace him.<sup>49</sup> Khalid and Qalandar both maintain that Nimeiri himself admitted to a meeting of senior military officers in the same year that the medicines he had been prescribed were affecting his judgement and that he would step down in August 1982 – although, assuming the story is true, he clearly did not keep to his pledge.<sup>50</sup> Oppositionists were well aware of Nimeiri's mental instability. Ghazi Suleiman recalls rumours that Nimeiri had 'started to greet empty chairs'.<sup>51</sup> In spite of his admission that the medication prescribed by his American doctors were affecting his judgement, he frequently ignored their advice to go to sleep and avoid making any major political decisions immediately after taking this medication.<sup>52</sup> This infuriated senior aides and American diplomats alike.<sup>53</sup>

It is important to understand that the decisions Nimeiri made in the later years of the May Regime were not those of a fully rational individual. While he continued to retain traces of the slyness and political guile that marked his earlier years, his strategies were also shaped by rashness, vindictiveness and, often, paranoia. His assault on his former allies began with the SSU. Khalid recalls that in August 1979, he publicly lambasted the SSU at a meeting of its politburo, condemning its 'failure ... to combat the causes of the peoples' sufferings'.<sup>54</sup> He followed up this tirade by dismissing Abul Gasim Ibrahim, the secretary-general of the SSU and the last surviving member of the old Revolutionary Command Council,<sup>55</sup> of whose ambitions he had been highly suspicious.<sup>56</sup> The next incumbent, army commander-in-chief Abd al-Majid Hamid



al-Khalil, survived until January 1982, at which point Nimeiri dissolved the SSU politburo, Central Committee and general secretariat simultaneously.<sup>57</sup> He replaced them with a 'popular committee' that answered directly to him.<sup>58</sup>

Abd al-Qadir recalls that from the late 1970s, Nimeiri treated the SSU as 'his own private kingdom'.<sup>59</sup> William Pierce, the chief political officer at the American embassy in Khartoum from 1983 to 1985, recalls that 'He was a survivor essentially ... he had gone through the revolutionary councils and one by one the other partners were weeded out and he had twisted and turned and shaped personalities within his government so that he was the one who knew how to handle things in Sudan'.<sup>60</sup> In other words, Nimeiri made himself the May Regime – and the May Regime thus became dependent upon his personal survival and stability.

In accruing all power to himself, Nimeiri wrought further destruction on the central organs of state in a policy Khalid refers to as the 'emaciation of the institutions'.<sup>61</sup> Between 1979 and 1982, he marginalized the police leadership and purged the army high command.<sup>62</sup> In the following year, he employed his presidential powers to summarily dismiss fifty members of the judiciary.<sup>63</sup> The only state institution he left untouched was the State Security Organization, which was established in 1978 to combine the functions of internal and external security and which reported directly to his vice-president, Umar al-Tayyib. As will be seen in Chapter 5, the creation of this body further fuelled the resentment of other institutions sidelined by Nimeiri, particularly the army and the police.

### The 1977 reconciliation and Nimeiri's alliance with the ICF

Nimeiri compensated for his marginalization of a number of the pillars of the May Regime by embracing a new ally, Hasan al-Turabi's Islamic Charter Front. Having narrowly survived the National Front *coup d'état* in 1976, he resolved that his enemies should be kept closer than his increasingly diminishing circle of friends; thus he signed a reconciliation deal that brought the two main parties within the National Front, the Umma and the ICF, into the government. After this, the Nimeiri system increasingly came to resemble Brumberg's 'liberal autocracy', as Umma and ICF candidates stood for SSU elections and the relics of the multi-party era were incorporated into the one-party system established by the 'May Revolution'. The 'socialist' nature of the May Regime was thus irretrievably diluted as Nimeiri became focused on survival.

The unstable dictator's increasing inability to manage this system of liberal autocracy helps explain his downfall. In the short term, however, his rapprochement with the religious parties helped to guarantee the survival of the May Regime. The ICF, with its links to the new system of Islamic banking and dominant influence within the student movement, possessed sufficient economic and political weight to keep Nimeiri's government stable. But as a long-term survival measure, his increasing empowerment of the ICF was misguided. He might have been able to play the other political groups – the Umma, the DUP, the SSU old guard and the southern



regionalists – off against each other, and was able to do this with the various state institutions. However, the ICF was far too well organized and financially strong for Nimeiri to simply control it, and as soon as he gave the party access to the state, it began to infiltrate the major security services.<sup>64</sup> Nimeiri could dance with the devil – he would later become fond of referring to the ICF/'Muslim Brotherhood' as the 'brotherhood of Satan' – but it was always to his tune. His increasing dependence on them quite possibly illustrated the impact of his medication on his decision-making – Abu Rannat even claims that ICF ministers exploited Nimeiri's fits of malaise to persuade him to push through decisions that suited them.<sup>65</sup>

While he was increasing his reliance on the ICF, Nimeiri burned bridges elsewhere. He severed his ties with his former southern allies in a catastrophic fashion. In May 1983, he announced a plan to divide the autonomous 'Southern Region' into three new regions: Equatoria, Upper Nile and Bahr al-Ghazal. The president justified this as an extension of the regionalization measures he had recently undertaken in the north. However, particularly since the move involved the dissolution of the autonomous regional assembly in Juba, it was widely understood by southerners to be an attempt to diminish the independence of southern Sudan by dividing the territory up into smaller and weaker political units unable to resist the power of the centre.<sup>66</sup> The re-division directly precipitated the formation of a new southern rebel movement, the Sudan People's Liberation Army, by defecting southern units of the armed forces.<sup>67</sup> The resulting civil war would last 22 years, and turn against him allies whose support had previously been crucial. The decision suited Nimeiri's alliance with the ICF, which was keen to integrate southern Sudan into the north, but by marginalizing all the other forces on the Sudanese political scene, he was cultivating a crippling dependence upon this party.

In line with his pact with the ICF, Nimeiri pursued a policy of 'Islamization' of the law. In 1979, he appointed al-Turabi as attorney-general and tasked him with heading a commission to revise Sudan's laws in conformity with *shari'a*.<sup>68</sup> However, the manner in which Nimeiri implemented his 'Islamization' programme condemned him to further political isolation. Knowing that giving the ICF full responsibility for the revivification of *shari'a* might guarantee them an unassailable strong position within the state, he dismissed al-Turabi 4 months before the eventual promulgation of the new laws.<sup>69</sup> 'Nimeiri didn't want credit for *shari'a* to go to me', recalls al-Turabi, in one of his less misleading statements.<sup>70</sup> Instead, the president turned to an obscure lawyer, Awad al Jeed, and the son of the leader of a minor *sufi* order to which the president had grown close, the judge Nayal Abu Gurun, to help him compose the final draft of the laws.<sup>71</sup> The result was that the 'September Laws' of 1983 included some bizarre deviations from classical *shari'a*. Most notably, Nimeiri's new assistants invented a crime called 'intention to commit fornication' (*shuruu fi zina*) and vastly expanded the standard definition of what constituted a *hadd* offence so that between 1983 and 1985 probably well over 100 people had their hands amputated.<sup>72</sup> Part of the reason so many penalties of this nature were applied was that Nimeiri established 'Instantaneous Justice Courts' under his emergency law of 1984; these bypassed the regular justice system and applied penalties with little regard for standard legal procedure.<sup>73</sup>

Abdullahi Ali Ibrahim has recently contended that the manner in which the new laws were applied reflected Nimeiri's masterly populism, suggesting that Khartoum's urban crowds welcomed the 'instantaneous justice' after years of witnessing Sudan's previous justice system failing to deal with crime in a speedy and efficient manner.<sup>74</sup> However, many others have suggested that the Sudanese public saw the new measures for what they were, a distortion of Islam.<sup>75</sup> Al-Sadiq al-Mahdi exploited the popular resentment of the laws and their deviation from classical *shari'a* when he denounced them in front of hundreds of thousands of supporters in Omdurman.<sup>76</sup> The new laws also mortified the educated elites and urban professionals.<sup>77</sup> Again, the rationality of the manner of Nimeiri's 'Islamization' of the law is highly questionable. Bill Kontos, who as American ambassador at the time met the president on a number of occasions, admits that 'how much of this fundamentalism Nimeiri believed and how much was calculated cynicism, I do not know', but – with reference to the medication he was taking at the time – argues that by 1983 'Nimeiri was becoming irrational, to put it mildly'.<sup>78</sup>

By implementing these 'Islamization' measures, Nimeiri also undermined himself in another respect. Even though he had attempted to disassociate the ICF from his new religious agenda by replacing al-Turabi as attorney-general, in practice he was forced to rely heavily on the party and its sympathizers to implement the new measures, particularly after his conflict with the existing police and judicial apparatus. The ICF established 'Societies for the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice', which, as he admitted in an angry public rant against the ICF later in 1984, began to take it upon themselves to play the role of the police.<sup>79</sup> Meanwhile, Mukashifi al-Kabbashi, the ICF sympathizer who presided over the High Court of Appeal, used the powers granted to him by the September Laws and the 1984 emergency regulations to pursue a fiercely aggressive policy of 'Islamization'. Under al-Kabbashi's guidance, the Instantaneous Justice Courts indirectly targeted a number of those among Nimeiri's SSU 'old guard' who still remained loyal, such as Khalid Hassan Abbas, Mamoun Awad Abu Zeid and Umar al-Tayyib, by prosecuting their relatives for crimes such as drunkenness and corruption.<sup>80</sup> It seems that Nayal Abu Gurun and Awad al-Jeed, who Abu Rannat and Abd al-Aziz suggest were closer to the ICF than was known at the time, supported this process.<sup>81</sup> Ibrahim argues that bringing the rich and mighty to heel in this manner was part of Nimeiri's populist strategy – but if any popular credit did accrue from these cases, it would have gone to the ICF, whose members and affiliates serving on the 'Instantaneous Justice Courts' pursued these trials. Nimeiri had, in el-Affendi's words, 'unwittingly unleashed' a 'deluge'.<sup>82</sup> On the first anniversary of the declaration of *shari'a*, the ICF poured its financial resources into mobilizing a huge demonstration attended by senior Muslim Brother intellectuals from across the Islamic world. This celebratory procession effectively exposed the weakness of the SSU, which was incapable of drawing such numbers to its own rallies at the time.<sup>83</sup> Thus Nimeiri had enabled the ICF to undermine his only remaining adherents and radically strengthen its own grip on the state.

Even as the president was beginning to doubt the merits of his allegiance with the ICF, his desire to defend the new laws led him to take a series of vindictive and arbitrary measures against his leftist and secularist critics, which startled the intelligentsia.

His first target was Mahmud Muhammad Taha, a liberal Islamic reformer whose Republican Brother movement was influential in governmental and intellectual circles. In December 1984, Taha and several other leading Republican Brothers issued a pamphlet, 'Either this or the Flood' (*Hadha au al-Tawwafan*), denouncing the September Laws as a violation of Islam.<sup>84</sup> Nimeiri's response was swift and brutal: he had Taha arrested and in mid-January 1985, following a show-trial, the 76-year-old was executed for 'heresy'.<sup>85</sup> The judicial murder of Taha was highly detrimental to the president's own survival prospects, since the execution aggrieved a far greater number of parties than it pleased. Numerous senior SSU figures, including Umar al-Tayyib, had tried to talk him out of it;<sup>86</sup> and even al-Turabi was wary of condoning it.<sup>87</sup> The decision was widely condemned in the Western media and even brought a denunciation from the US State Department.<sup>88</sup> It was also the act that persuaded the various professional unions, which would ultimately form the National Alliance (and which had held a decisive meeting at the University of Khartoum following Taha's judicial murder), that Nimeiri should be toppled.<sup>89</sup>

Mansur Khalid, writing in February 1985, correctly predicted that by executing Taha, Nimeiri had 'sealed his fate'.<sup>90</sup> It is important to acknowledge just how actively the mentally unstable dictator contributed to his own downfall, since this enables us to understand why his regime collapsed during the economic crises of the mid-1980s whereas others in the region did not. Nimeiri had alienated all the major political forces other than the ICF – the army, the police, the judiciary, al-Sadiq al-Mahdi, the Republican Brothers and even his former allies in the SSU. In February 1985, he also incurred the wrath of the Ba'ath Party by charging four of its members with defamation of Islam, which brought more unwelcome attention from the rest of the Middle East.<sup>91</sup> These decisions were foolhardy not just because they united the entire political opposition against him, but also because they left him reliant on a domestically capable of becoming a dominant force in its own right; they were, furthermore highly unpalatable to his major international ally, the United States. The consequences of this unwise gambit would become clear following the visit of the US vice-president George Bush to Khartoum in early March 1985.

### The external factor: US-Sudanese relations in the buildup to 1985

In contrast to 1964, the policies of international actors, specifically the United States, had a more decisive impact when it came to shaping the political context of the *Intifada*. By the time this erupted, the United States had been a major influence on the Sudanese political scene for over a decade. Sudan had, like other major Arab nations, severed all ties with America following the Arab-Israeli war in 1967, but Nimeiri had re-established these ties in 1972, partly as a result of the rift with the SCP and a peace deal with the partially Christian south.<sup>92</sup> Following this, Washington began to support a number of agricultural development projects in Sudan and became involved in the negotiation of the country's debt problem.<sup>93</sup> From 1980, military assistance was



supplied in the context of the alliance between the two countries against Gaddafi's Libya.<sup>94</sup> During this partnership, joint military exercises were conducted in Sudan as an extension of 'Operation Bright Star', the US-Egyptian army training programme.<sup>95</sup> Such was the determination of the American government to employ Sudan as a regional counterweight to Gaddafi and the communist Mengistu in Ethiopia that this support continued – albeit anxiously – even after the outbreak of war in the south in 1983.<sup>96</sup>

The alliance with America was resented by the Sudanese public on a number of levels. As demonstrated above, it led Nimeiri to take a number of privatization measures and to cut back on state spending. It also dictated his diplomatic support for Anwar Sadat's 1979 Peace Agreement with Israel, which had provoked a popular furor all over the Arab world. Moreover, the US partnership led to Sudanese territorial sovereignty being abused in particularly odious ways. For example, in January 1985, Reagan negotiated a deal with Nimeiri to dump American toxic and nuclear waste in the famine-stricken northern Darfur.<sup>97</sup> A Democratic Unionist Party pamphlet published during the *Intifada* railed against this agreement and asked why the material could not be disposed of in the Nevada desert, complaining that the deposited waste would spread into the main watercourses and cause Sudan to become 'a country of retarded, disfigured cripples' (*dawla min al-mu'aqqin al-mushawwahin al-mutakhallafin*).<sup>98</sup>

The nuclear waste deal was not the most humiliating aspect of the American alliance as far as the Sudanese public was concerned. The period also witnessed a joint operation between the CIA, Mossad, South African intelligence and the SSO, that would be seen as a far more extensive abuse of the country's territorial sovereignty. During what would be referred to as 'Operation Moses', these intelligence agencies used the famine in Ethiopia and eastern Sudan as a cover to transport between 10,000 and 13,000 Ethiopian 'Tallasha' Jews to Israel via al-Azzaza airport in Gedaref, eastern Sudan.<sup>99</sup> The American and Sudanese governments had hoped to manage the process covertly, but details of the operation were soon leaked by a number of international media organizations, including the *Los Angeles Times*.<sup>100</sup> Umar al-Tayyib, the head of the SSO, would be accused at his trial following the *Intifada* of taking a 150,000 dollar bribe to guarantee the role of the SSO in the operation.<sup>101</sup> 'Operation Moses' enraged the politically astute sections of the Sudanese public, who perceived it as a political exploitation of the famine designed to provide manpower for Israel in its war against the population of Palestine.<sup>102</sup>

The impact of 'Operation Moses' and the nuclear waste story should not be exaggerated. Popular disapproval of Nimeiri's regime had already climaxed by the time these scandals occurred. However, one particular decision allegedly taken by the Americans may have played a major role in establishing the conditions for Nimeiri's downfall. It is widely believed in Sudan that when George Bush visited Sudan in early March, he suggested – or perhaps demanded – that Nimeiri remove the ICF from the government.<sup>103</sup> The usual explanation for this American move is that the United States was anxious about the impact that the 'Islamization' project was having and the growing strength of the ICF.<sup>104</sup>

It is difficult to ascertain what exactly Bush said to provoke Nimeiri's decision, if anything at all. However, it is true that his partnership with the ICF, and the partly related policies of re-dividing the south and 'Islamizing' the law, had brought the



president's relationship with his superpower ally to breaking point. In November 1984, the Middle East correspondent of the *Washington Post*, David Ottoway, published a lengthy article based on interviews with senior Reagan administration officials that claimed the American government was so despairing of the situation in Sudan that it did not care whether the Nimeiri regime remained or not.<sup>105</sup> In the same month, an English language intelligence appraisal prophesying the inevitable downfall of the May Regime and predicting a number of potential post-Nimeiri scenarios was, perhaps intentionally, leaked from a Western embassy in Khartoum and found its way to a variety of journalists and army officers.<sup>106</sup> The fact that Nimeiri's Western patrons became so openly critical in the aftermath of his 'Islamization' measures indicated that his domestic and international alliances had become incompatible.

After Bush's visit, Nimeiri immediately moved against the ICF, ordering the SSO to apprehend its senior cadres. It was not an auspicious decision as far as the dictator's survival chances were concerned. If Bush did prompt these measures, then he had effectively forced the Sudanese president to commit political suicide. Having cut off the ICF, Nimeiri was now bereft of allies and, in effect, a political sitting duck. In this sense, the United States had played a major role in destabilizing the dictator, although Nimeiri had already gone most of the way towards bringing about his own downfall. His rash dependence on the ICF alliance had made his political isolation in March 1985 inevitable.

### The outbreak of the *Intifada*

Nimeiri's downfall may have been self-inflicted. Nevertheless, it was the political parties, the professional associations and the student unions that determined the manner of his demise and its ultimate consequences. On 26 March 1985, a student demonstration at Omdurman Islamic University was quickly supported by protests at other universities and among the public at large.<sup>107</sup> Nimeiri's State Security Organization was the only body willing to confront the demonstrations, and the manner in which it did so soon provoked further unrest. On 27 March, the doctors of Khartoum hospital arranged a strike to protest against the actions of SSO agents who had been shooting demonstrators dead from close range. Fellow professional groups rapidly joined their protest and began calling for a general strike to topple the regime.<sup>108</sup>

The lame response of the government to the demonstrations illustrated just how effectively Nimeiri had undermined his own regime. To the surprise of the military leadership,<sup>109</sup> he left Sudan for the United States the day the *Intifada* broke out, and was thus unable to direct the government response to the protests. The manner in which he departed revealed his diminishing ability to judge the public mood. The American embassy's chief political officer, William A. Pierce, who helped see him off at the airport, recalls:

I'm standing near our car while all of the ambassadors line up and the ministers are out there, and Nimeiry drives up. In the background you can see puffs of smoke coming from the city where cars are burning in the streets. And they stand around

and then Nimeiri comes up. He comes out in dark sunglasses with a turtle-neck sweater on, goes and jokes with all of his ministers, and this smoke is coming up behind him, and then he finally gets on the plane and flies off never to come back.<sup>110</sup>

Flying away at a time of mass civil protest was another self-destructive act – as Nimeiri had subordinated all the major security units to his personal command, officials were left in a state of confusion as to how to respond to the subsequent demonstrations.<sup>111</sup>

In spite of Nimeiri's injudicious exit, a few senior officials, including Khalid Hasan Abbas and Abu'l Gasim Ibrahim, attempted to stage a show of support for him. On 2 April, Abu'l Gasim Ibrahim made a desperate attempt to whip up public support by clinging to the legacy of the October Revolution, reminding the crowds that 'we [i.e. the former Free Officers in the May Regime] were the makers of the October Revolution; accusing the demonstrators of wishing to 'return to obeying the weak ... for this is the history of the sectarians'.<sup>112</sup> Abu'l Gasim was, in effect, trying to deter the demonstrators by making what by then was the highly spurious claim that the May Regime was the guardian of the October Revolution. He also warned that they would suffer a fate similar to that of their predecessors in 1964, who had allowed the gains of their uprising to be wasted by permitting the 'sectarian' political parties supported by the *Ansar* and Khatmiyya religious orders to return to power. However, the crowds paid little attention to this speech. Only around 3,000 people attended the pro-Nimeiri demonstration, and it seems that a number of them were coerced.<sup>113</sup> Even the majority of the SSU leadership remained aloof throughout these events, partially out of frustration at the manner in which Nimeiri had emasculated it in the years preceding the *Intifada*.<sup>114</sup> All this illustrated the extent to which the president had eradicated his own support base. However, the considerable numerical strength of the anti-regime demonstration that followed on 3 April was just as significant. By 4 April, global media outlets were reporting that 80 per cent of public and private sectors were participating in the general strike.<sup>115</sup> It was the sheer social and political breadth of the protests against Nimeiri that would ultimately dictate the nature of the transfer of power.

Nimeiri's self-destruction did not guarantee the return of a democratic regime. Other African dictators of the Cold War era had brought about their own downfall and simply been replaced by other dictators – Amin and Bokassa being good examples. It seemed highly possible in 1985 that such an eventuality might befall Sudan. Many Sudanese believed that the Americans wanted Umar al-Tayyib to take over from Nimeiri.<sup>116</sup> The CIA representative in Khartoum, 'Mr Milton', is reported to have intimated to the vice-president that he should replace Nimeiri, and both the Americans and Egyptians appear to have encouraged this by deliberately delaying Nimeiri's return to Sudan.<sup>117</sup> However, it is unclear how seriously Umar al-Tayyib considered conducting his own coup. Taj al-Din Fadl, the deputy commander-in-chief of the army, certainly believed that he had. He informed *MERIP* later in 1985 that 'General Tayyib betrayed Numairi from the very start. He minimized the importance of events in Khartoum and discouraged Numairi from returning to the country. He was hoping to take over himself, based on his command of the army and the fact that the constitution named him as interim president in the president's absence.' Taj al-Din

Fadl claimed that it was widely known that al-Tayyib 'had an agreement with the Americans and Egyptians'.<sup>118</sup> However, what *MERIP* did not report was that Taj al-Din Fadl possessed a bitter personal grudge against Umar al-Tayyib,<sup>119</sup> which may well have caused him to exaggerate this story. Many accounts exist that contradict Fadl's claims. One Sudanese journalist asserts that Umar al-Tayyib was sending desperate messages to Nimeiri in Washington appealing to him to come back to Khartoum, while another suggests that even as late as 5 April, he was pinning his hopes on the president returning to Sudan.<sup>120</sup>

Other sources suggest that Umar al-Tayyib never attempted seriously to take over because he knew that he would never be accepted by either the public or the army.<sup>121</sup> When the army leadership met with him on 4 April to discuss the security situation, they rejected his proposal of a state of emergency outright and several officers even attacked him in a highly personal manner.<sup>122</sup> Moreover, senior political representatives of the banned political parties began to declare that they would accept no 'forged replacement' (*badila za'ifa*) of Nimeiri's regime.<sup>123</sup> The 'Alliance of the Sudanese People' declared that they 'would not accept a new Nimeiri under any garb'.<sup>124</sup> A DUP pamphlet demanded a 'return to liberal democracy'.<sup>125</sup> The DUP and Umma in particular had always remained relatively committed to the principle of liberal democracy, but they were now in a much stronger position given that Nimeiri's indiscriminate attacks against left, right and centre had united them in opposition to the regime and had furthermore brought them into an alliance with the professional unions.

The fact that the professional unions and the major northern political parties in Khartoum were able to coordinate throughout the uprising enabled them to put forward a common set of demands, the most prominent of which was the return of liberal democracy. Late in the evening of 5 April, six professional unions alongside the Umma, DUP and SCP formed the 'National Alliance for the Salvation of the Nation' (usually abbreviated to the 'National Alliance'), and announced a 'National Charter'. The charter established the following goals:

- (1) Responding to the call of the people as demonstrated in the 3 April demonstration to get rid of the May Regime
- (2) Establishing a three-year transitional government, which has the following tasks:
  - (a) arranging political life in the country in accordance with the 1956 transitional constitution modified for 1964 in keeping with the aims set out in this charter and preserving the reputation of the modern forces in the constitutional institutions via democratic organizations
  - (b) preserving citizens' basic freedoms in terms of freedom of movement, faith, organization in accordance with international documents concerning human rights
  - (c) dealing with the problem in the south on the basis of regional self-rule on a democratic basis in accordance with established principles
  - (d) liberating the country from economic subjection to global imperialism, building a strong social and economic base, dealing with the economic crisis, mobilizing economic resources and fighting famine and desertification
  - (e) having a non-aligned foreign policy, adhering firmly to Arab and African belongings, and pursuing a policy of having good relationships with neighbouring states
  - (f) confirming the principle of democratic governance
  - (g) making the civil service neutral, and getting rid of the



May institutions and dispensing with the parasitic May Regime class (h) ensuring that the country be ruled in the transitional period by a constitution established by a democratically chosen body and that the country resolve the intellectual and political issues by democratic means.<sup>126</sup>

The National Alliance thus articulated the charter to suit liberal and socialist sentiments, through references to human rights and 'liberation from economic subjection to global imperialism', as well as those of the more parochial and socially conservative parties, through the commitment to 'adhere firmly to Arab and African belongings'. All of the signatories could identify with 'getting rid of the May institutions and dispensing with the parasitic May Regime class'. Although it is unclear whether the signing of the National Charter influenced Siwar al-Dahab's decision to 'side with the people', the fact that the demands for a return to liberal democracy were being articulated so clearly and pursued with such broad political support seemed to dictate the nature of the army's response to the *Intifada*. At 9:35 on the morning of 6 April, the army commander-in-chief, Siwar al-Dahab, announced that the army would be taking over the reins of power and deposing not just Nimeiri but the May Regime as a whole. Siwar al-Dahab declared in his famous radio broadcast:

The Sudan Armed Forces have been observing the deteriorating security situation all over the country, and the extremely complex political crisis that has affected the country over the past few days. In order to reduce bloodshed and ensure the country's independence and unity, the armed forces have decided unanimously to stand by the people and their choice and respond to their demands by taking over power and transferring it to the people after a specified transitional period.<sup>127</sup>

This declaration, with its perhaps intentionally ambiguous references to the 'extremely complicated political crisis' and 'deteriorating security situation', was noticeably devoid of revolutionary rhetoric. While Siwar al-Dahab may have used the term 'the people' in an abstract sense, as Jadein observes, he did not declare that the army was standing by the *Intifada*, or its principles.<sup>128</sup> It is worth considering the character of Siwar al-Dahab at this point. He was widely reputed to be an unambitious man who did not desire a long term in political office. As will be seen in Chapter 5, he was at first unwilling to take action against Nimeiri and did so only under pressure from senior and middle-ranking army officers. However, while he was at first fearful of replacing the president, he was not eager to establish himself as a substitute either. As a token of his commitment to liberal multi-party politics, Siwar al-Dahab immediately abrogated Nimeiri's 1973 constitution, which had acted as the basis for the one-party state.

## Religion and nation in the 1985 uprising

The fact that the *Intifada* brought about the abrogation of Sudan's least religiously driven constitution leads us to question the extent to which its protagonists were really secular in outlook. As we have seen, academic commentators tend to attribute the uprising to the same spirit of 'civil' political action and 'secular nationalism' that they



argue drove the independence movement.<sup>129</sup> Gallab maintains that the strength of the belief in the Sudanese 'civil religion' was 'confirmed by the successful execution of the April 1985 *Intifada* against the Ja'far Nimaini dictatorship'.<sup>130</sup> Indeed, the 1985 uprising was apparently orchestrated in a very worldly arena. Meetings were held in student unions, professionals' clubs and private houses; the urban crowds – where they needed any encouragement at all – were mobilized through pamphlets and slogans painted on walls, in addition to speeches delivered in public squares.

The fact that the Sudanese public had experienced such recent success in staging a 'civil' uprising helps explain why they were able to repeat this feat in the middle of the 1980s, at a time when political autocracy was the norm in the region and resistance to entrenched regimes tended to come only from the Muslim Brotherhood. Sudanese journalists were quick to identify the importance of the October Revolution as a point of inspiration. The day after Siwar al-Dahab's famous broadcast, *al-Sahafa* observed that the chants that had been sung during the April *Intifada* were the same as those heard in October 1964. 'Return return, o October ...' was a common mantra for the protesters.<sup>131</sup> The fact that Abu'l Gasim Ibrahim had felt compelled to acknowledge it in his speech on 2 April demonstrated just how influential the legacy of October remained.

As was the case with the October Revolution, Sudanese intellectuals and the northern urban public interpreted the April *Intifada* as one more victory in a series of Sudanese 'nationalist' victories. 'National songs' (*anashid wataniyya*) were chanted during the uprising in Port Sudan.<sup>132</sup> Leaders of the *Intifada* such as Mirghani al-Nasri have even claimed that there is an innate democratic spirit within the Sudanese national identity. More than two decades after the *Intifada*, he stated that 'democracy is one of the features of the Sudanese national character', which he attributed to the fact that the sheer geographic size of Sudan and its numerous open spaces bred a spirit of individual freedom and egalitarianism.<sup>133</sup> While this theory might be somewhat romantic in nature, it demonstrates the vigour with which the leaders of the *Intifada* attached themselves to the ideals of nationalism and democracy. Saif al-Dawla Ahmad Khalil, writing in *al-Sahafa* 6 days after the *Intifada*, argued that it was the product of the same national spirit that had 'enabled the Imam al-Mahdi to lead the Sudanese people in the sweeping national revolution [of 1885] ... and which motivated the Khalifa Abdallahi and the masses of the *Ausar* to sacrifice themselves for the benefit of this great nation in the epic witnessed at Umm Diwaykarat and which at the same time was the motive for Abd al-Latif and Abd al-Fadil and al-Qurayshi and Abd al-Hamid Sa'id and the martyrs of April, and April will remain as a fuel for what comes after it'.<sup>134</sup>

There is an ambiguity here. In some respects, these representations went against the grain of the radical Islamist discourses of the latter half of the twentieth century, which insisted that nationalism of any form detracted from the universality of Islam.<sup>135</sup> In this sense, al-Nasri did represent what Woodward terms the 'spirit of secular nationalism within the intelligentsia', even though he was an Islamist.<sup>136</sup> However, the discourses of men like Khalil and al-Nasri did not exactly represent an identification with a secular nationalist past, especially since the wars waged by Muhammad Ahmad al-Mahdi and the Khalifa Abdallahi had been inspired by revivalist Islam. Furthermore, it is worth remembering that al-Nasri and a number of the other professionals who helped

establish the National Alliance believed that Islam should play a significant role in public life (see Chapter 4).

Admittedly, the 'National Charter', although it was penned by the Imam of the *Ansar al-Sadiq al-Mahdi*, contained relatively few Islamist slogans. Nevertheless, religious discourse featured more noticeably in the April *Intifada* than it had in 1964. This was because the late regime had conditioned the response to it. While Nimeiri's *shari'a* was widely condemned for its inaccuracies and distortions of jurisprudential norms, it nevertheless resembled classical Islamic law more closely than any legal system obtaining in Sudan since the downfall of the Mahdist state. Nimeiri and the ICF had placed religion back at the centre of political life, and, as a result, their opponents were forced engage with them in religious terms and criticize them from a religious perspective. El-Affendi argues that as a result of Nimeiri's implementation of *shari'a* in 1983, 'Many debates were sparked on the issues involved, and many turned to the study of Islamic texts. This compulsory Islamic education finally turned the language Ikhwan kept speaking in relative solitude into the language of the majority, and even Ikhwan opponents started citing the classical Islamic texts.'<sup>137</sup>

While el-Affendi himself is sympathetic to the Islamic Movement, it is difficult to deny the accuracy of his judgement. For instance, Mahmud Muhammad Taha, even though he argued that the Quran and Sunna rather than medieval Islamic texts should be taken as the basis for a modern Islamic philosophy, attacked the September Laws on the grounds that they deviated from the principles of classical Islamic jurisprudence by permitting amputation as a penalty for theft of public property.<sup>138</sup> Sadiq al-Mahdi's denunciation of Nimeiri's *shari'a* incorporated citations from the classical scholar Ibn Taymiyya and the second Caliph.<sup>139</sup> Even the SCP's underground organ *al-Midan*, while criticizing the abuse of Islam as 'a cover for arriving into power' following the promulgation of the September Laws, acknowledged that 'Islam as a source of legislation and as a general intellectual orientation can inspire the struggle of our people against dictatorship'.<sup>140</sup> In 1980, *al-Midan* cited a number of cases in which vocal members of the Islamic Movement had been shouted down after attempting to air their views in Khartoum's mosques.<sup>141</sup> This in itself indicates the party's awareness that places of worship were becoming a more important battleground.

The issue of rebellion against an unjust ruler highlights the extent to which the protagonists of the *Intifada* were divided between secular and religious outlooks. In Sunni Islam, the majority of religious authorities consider forbidden any rebellion against a ruler towards whom *bay'a* has been sworn. This was why the mainstream of the Muslim Brotherhood were wary of rebellion against Sadat and Mubarak in Egypt, and why Siwar al-Dahab, a pious man, was said to have been wary of betraying his *ba'ia* to Nimeiri.<sup>142</sup> One of the principal exceptions was the scholar Ibn Taymiyya, who was cited in a pamphlet issued by the DUP during the *Intifada* to question the religious legitimacy of Nimeiri's decision to appoint himself as *Imam* of the Sudan.<sup>143</sup> Taymiyya's arguments were favoured by the militant Islamic movements of the 1980s, although the DUP was a far more conservative party and as such their usage of his writings was probably more opportunistic. Others were less concerned with the religious doctrine concerning *ba'ya*. Fadlallah Burma Nasir, summarizing the attitude of the regional commanders in the Sudanese army who chose to rebel against Nimeiri, argues that

'We all swore allegiance to him, but the question was whether there would be a nation or whether there would not. ... I consider the oath to the nation (*al-Watan*) and not to [particular] people.'<sup>144</sup> This indicates that even in the 1980s, the more secular idea of the nation as opposed to the religious community and its *Imam* was still a motivating factor for those who participated in the *Intifada*.

It is perhaps the experience of two civilian insurrections that has enabled the Sudanese public to recapture the spirit of the mid-twentieth century national independence struggle, and ensured that the ideals of secular nationalism have remained prominent in the language of political opposition in Sudan. Nevertheless, it seems that Islamist ideals have become inseparably intertwined with this discourse, and even the most 'secular' of the *Intifada*'s protagonists became aware of the necessity of justifying protest in religious terms. Thus the language of the *Intifada* represented neither a purely 'Islamist' nor a purely secular discourse, but a meshing of the two.

### Social composition of the *Intifada*

While the leaders of the uprising were forced to accept the ICI's creation of a pivotal role for religious discourse within the national political arena, the *Intifada* also embraced a large number of the social classes directly marginalized by Nimeiri's *shari'a*. Given that Khartoum had experienced a considerable degree of rural-urban migration during the 21 years following the October Revolution, the urban demonstrations witnessed during the *Intifada* embraced a far wider spectrum of Sudanese society. Although al-Hussein reports that the 27 March demonstrations were led by the students and workers, this does not do justice to the sheer breadth of their composition. Just as in 1964, newspaper reports on the social backgrounds of the dead and injured offer a useful index for analysis. The demonstrators who were killed by SSO bullets during the 27 March protest had both northern Arabic and southern Sudanese names. The two southerners were William Deng Kol, a 20-year-old studying at Comboni College, and Paul Maat, from the suburb of Haj Yousif.<sup>145</sup> The list of injured included Tariq Sa'id, an employee in the water administration in Wad Madani; Abbakr Muhammad Hasan, a mechanic residing in the industrial region of north Khartoum; Bakri Hasan Mustafa, a 16-year-old school student; and Abbud Muhammad Ibrahim, a vegetable seller who lived in the suburb of Mayo.<sup>146</sup> Thus we can see that the demonstrations, from both a social and an ethnic perspective, incorporated a broad section of Sudanese society.

It is noteworthy that a number of the *Intifada*'s martyrs hailed from the economically marginalized peri-urban suburbs of Khartoum such as Mayo and Haj Yousif. These regions, which housed migrants from Sudan's rural peripheries, had mushroomed in size during the decades preceding the April *Intifada*. Khartoum's population rose from about a quarter of a million in 1956 to almost 3 million in 1993.<sup>147</sup> A significant amount of this migration was the result of forced displacement caused by drought, famine and war in the regions.<sup>148</sup> However, it was also due to the fact that the economic policies of the various post-colonial regimes had made urban living far more attractive. As elsewhere in Africa,<sup>149</sup> governments in Sudan have forced rural food producers to



sell their produce at a minimal price to benefit traders supplying the needs of urban populations.<sup>130</sup> In a perverse way, this reflected the legacy of the October Revolution – since the protests that had overthrown Abboud were largely urban in nature, subsequent regimes fearing the same fate tended to focus on providing for the needs of the populations of the towns.<sup>131</sup>

Northern governing elites have coined a variety of pejorative terms to describe the inhabitants of these urban shanty-towns. They often refer to them as 'vagrants' (*mutasharriddin*), or as *shamasa*, which literally translates to 'the people of the sun'. Ahmad al-Fadaylabi, a social worker, argued in 1985 that the term *shamasa* was first invented by the regime to stigmatize economically and socially marginalized groups. The term, al-Fadaylabi argues, was intended to conjure images of people who 'lived under the sun' (i.e. were homeless), and 'inclined towards chaos', and thus to blur together images of peaceful protesters and unemployed, potentially violent vagrants.<sup>132</sup> The government began to target these groups systematically in the later periods of the May Regime, making a number of attempts to dispatch them back to the rural areas. In 1979, Nimeiri declared that he was launching a campaign of 'public discipline' (*al-indibat al-ʿāam*), ordering the mass arrest by the police of unemployed people on the outskirts of the capital who would be sent to work on the government's newly established rain-fed agricultural schemes in the countryside.<sup>133</sup> In September 1981, he commanded the police to launch 'dragnet' operations throughout Sudan's major urban centres, particularly the slums, the purpose of which was to 'clean up the country of criminals and jobless elements'.<sup>134</sup> The banning of alcohol distribution under the newly 'Islamized' legislation of 1983 had caused a great degree of unemployment within these regions, since brewing was a crucial part of the local economy in many of the regions from which the inhabitants of these shanty towns hailed.

Even allowing for the fact that the regime's media organs deliberately exaggerated the role of the *shamasa* in the urban demonstrations in order to stimulate middle class anxiety, it is difficult to deny that they turned out in large numbers during the *Intifada*. One witness recalls that 'the *shamasa* were the salt of the revolution, because they mobilized the street'.<sup>135</sup> Another observes that 'the *shamasa* give *hamas* [passion]'.<sup>136</sup> However, to emphasize the role of the so-called *shamasa* and the unemployed inhabitants of the shanty-towns would be to neglect the fact that a number of the rural migrants who participated were those who worked in small-time jobs in the informal economy of these peri-urban regions,<sup>137</sup> or even those who were engaged in menial work in the mainstream economy of central Khartoum.

In spite of the presence of this new urban social category, the professional elite dominated the leadership of the uprising, as they had done in 1964. As seen above, the National Charter was signed by representatives of three political parties in addition to six professional unions, those of the doctors, lawyers, engineers, bank clerks, University of Khartoum lecturers and insurance brokers. Although a number of the leaders of the *Intifada* genuinely sympathized with the plight of the inhabitants of the shanty-towns, they struggled to forge genuine forms of association with them. 'The mobs participated', recalls Ghazi Suleiman, a member of the Bar Association. 'I led some of the demonstrations, I cry, they cry after me. That is all'.<sup>138</sup> 'There was no conversation between them and others', argues Mahjub Sharif, 'they had no ideas and



no opinions.<sup>159</sup> Almost all of Sudan's communists were classical Marxists, and would therefore have been unable to accept this disenfranchised urban *lumpen proletariat* as a revolutionary class. Thus, in spite of the failure of the regime to exploit the socio-economic chasm between the 'centres' and 'peripheries' of Sudanese society so as to guarantee its survival, the middle class leaders of the civilian insurrection were only able to break this divide in the most superficial of ways. In this sense, although the *Intifada* had embraced a far wider social demographic than the 1964 Revolution, it had reproduced a number of its failures.

### The provincial uprisings

Just as the professional elites guiding the *Intifada* failed to establish links with the marginalized urban populations, so also was the *Intifada* not the product of the mobilization of Sudan's rural peripheries. As in 1964, the provincial upheavals of 1985 were a development of the wider insurrection in Khartoum, rather than self-propelled incidents. This was in spite of the fact that provincial discontent was far more widespread at the twilight of the Nimeiri era than it had been in 1964, mainly because of the deteriorating economic situation and frustration that the president's much touted 'regionalization' measures of 1980 had resulted in little practical change in the relationship between the centre and the provinces. There were outbreaks of popular protest in Kordofan in 1980, 1982 and 1984 as a result of increases in bread prices, which saw local SSU offices being set ablaze.<sup>160</sup> In the Darfur 'Intifada' of 1981, over twenty people were killed in protests that eventually forced Nimeiri to back down from his decision to appoint a non-Darfuri, al-Tāyyib al-Mardi, as governor of the region.<sup>161</sup> The Ba'ath Party's campaign against the 1984 state of emergency saw members arrested in towns as far away from the centre as Dalanj and Babanusa.<sup>162</sup>

Nevertheless, when the provincial insurrections broke out in 1985, they were very much a response to events in Khartoum. There was one partial exception to this. Politicians from Atbara are fond of claiming that the uprising began in their town, since it had witnessed a series of protest rallies beginning on 7 March, two and a half weeks before the main uprising broke out in Khartoum.<sup>163</sup> This reflects the fact that the *Intifada*, in contrast to the events of 1964, was motivated by a far more widespread series of structural and economic grievances, which affected the country as a whole. However, until the Khartoum uprising that began on 26 March, the demonstrators in Atbara were the loudest in voicing disapproval of the regime's decision to increase the prices of basic commodities.<sup>164</sup> It was not until 2 April that they began to openly call for Nimeiri's ouster.<sup>165</sup>

The extent to which the provincial commotions followed from the initial spark in Khartoum is illustrated by the critical role achieved by the Doctors' Union in each of the major northern towns. The main union in the capital sent telex messages to its provincial branches telling them to join in the general strike, and even sent medics to the provinces in person, a number of whom were arrested.<sup>166</sup> The Doctors' Union in Port Sudan began the protests there with a strike on 2 April, and in Kassala, the local demonstrations were also commenced by medical practitioners, who presented

a memorandum to the governor of the eastern region on 4 April announcing that they were initiating an open strike.<sup>167</sup> There was also a large demonstration in Wad Madani, led by representatives of twelve separate unions, which presented a memorandum to the government demanding the dissolution of both the SSU and SSO.<sup>168</sup> There were also major demonstrations in Sinja, Gedaref, al-Fashir, Nyala, Geneina, Kosti, al-Ubayyid and Sinnar.<sup>169</sup> In Darfur, Umma sympathizers probably played a more significant role than professionals.<sup>170</sup> As one Darfuri who witnessed the 1985 uprising in Nyala recalls, the population of the town decided it was against Nimeiri when al-Sadiq al-Mahdi decided he was against Nimeiri.<sup>171</sup>

Just as in 1964, these provincial upheavals had a substantial impact on the local political fabric. In Port Sudan, the general strike continued for 4 days, between 6 April and 9 April.<sup>172</sup> The unions leading the uprisings formed their own local branches of the National Alliance, which sent delegations to coordinate with the national body in Khartoum.<sup>173</sup> Even relatively minor towns like Sinkat in eastern Sudan established such bodies.<sup>174</sup> Members of provincial branches of labour and professional unions also gathered together to dismiss individuals planted in the union by the SSU from their memberships.<sup>175</sup> However, this hardly represented a 'regional revolution'. The fact that the Port Sudan branch of the 'National Alliance' established the local graduates' club as its headquarters highlighted the extent to which the educated elites dominated the provincial uprisings.<sup>176</sup> In eastern Sudan, the riverain technocrats and professionals who replaced Nimeiri's former regional government displaced a large number of the local Beja politicians who had served under the May Regime, and further demands for cleansing of the *ancien régime* became intermeshed with 'Arab-Beja' politics.<sup>177</sup> Thus it can be seen that the *Intifada* empowered the same social classes within the provinces that had pioneered the uprising in the riverain centre.

## Violence and non-violence in the *Intifada*

It was precisely because the riverain professional classes played such a key role in the *Intifada* that the beleaguered government endeavoured to deter them from joining the protests by trying to instil fears that Nimeiri's eclipse would offer marginalized groups the opportunity to wreak havoc. Throughout the history of the twentieth-century Middle East, governments have attempted to exploit public disorder as an image that inculcates fears of social anarchy.<sup>178</sup> The authorities in Sudan attempted to do as much during the April *Intifada*, seeking to exploit the specific social, cultural and regional divisions within Sudanese society to this end.

As the *Intifada* progressed, the government attempted to employ its media organs to undermine the protesters by accusing them of vandalism, and by stigmatizing the role played by the uprooted migrants. *Al-Sahafa* announced that major acts of sabotage were being conducted by 'vagrants' (*mutasharriidin*) and 'new arrivals' (*waafidiin*) from the countryside. The SSO rounded up and arrested thousands from these marginalized groups, taking them to holding camps in the desert outside Khartoum, where over 800 of them were subjected to summary trials. This represented a strategic effort to deter the educated and affluent classes of Khartoum from participating

in the *Intifada* by conjuring up a misleading picture of violence committed by the marginalized. Al-Fadaylabi argues that these economically peripheral groups made no effort to engage in attacks on property and in fact adopted the slogan 'no vandalism' (*la takhrib*).<sup>179</sup> Police transmissions intercepted by oppositionists during the *Intifada* acknowledged that the SSO were deliberately attempting to misrepresent the peaceful nature of the demonstrations in Haj Yousif, a suburb populated mainly by rural migrants.<sup>180</sup> According to one source, the SSO sent out teams of agents dressed as 'shamasa', who then set about damaging cars and petrol stations themselves.<sup>181</sup> Nevertheless, this scaremongering did not seem to dissuade the affluent professional elites who spearheaded the *Intifada* from rallying against the government.

The pacific nature of the protests was one of the most remarkable features of the uprising, since, as observed above, political violence in Sudan was far more extensive and more visceral by 1985 than it had been in 1964. Given the regime's tendency to resort to the use of force as a survival mechanism, it is not surprising that the various opposition parties had decided that Nimeiri could only be brought down by force of arms and resorted to backing armed attempts to overthrow the regime in 1970, 1975 and 1976. Against this background, the relative absence of violence in the 1985 *Intifada* is remarkable. Part of the reason for this was that Sadiq al-Mahdi had demobilized the majority of his *Ansar* fighters after the 1977 reconciliation and committed himself to civil opposition to the regime. The Umma would later claim that they had considered deploying armed party members during the uprising, but had decided against it.<sup>182</sup> In this sense, Joffe's observation that liberalized autocracies are more likely to be overthrown by pacific rather than violent opposition rings true for Sudan.

The SCP, wary of a repeat of the catastrophic showdown between Nimeiri and the party following the 1971 coup attempt, had also committed itself to civilian struggle following the model of October 1964.<sup>183</sup> An article published by *al-Midan* in 1983 criticized fellow oppositionists who believed that armed struggle was the only way to overthrow the regime, stating that it was necessary for Sudan to 'avoid the tragic experience of Uganda and Chad'.<sup>184</sup> In this context it is worth remembering again that the leaderships of the urban political parties, even the SCP, hailed mainly from the same relatively affluent, well-educated and socially homogeneous northern riverain elite. They therefore had little interest in the kind of violent revolution that might lead to a radical shake-up of the existing social and political order.

The uprising could potentially have turned violent if any of the opposition groups willing to use force to achieve their political goals, such as the Baathists or the ICF, had been able to stage a coup attempt, but this did not transpire.<sup>185</sup> There might also have been more bloodshed had Nimeiri been able to return to Khartoum. One of the generals who overthrew him concedes that he still retained a great deal of support within the army and that if he had been able to return, there would have been 'massacres and bloodshed and chaos' (*madhabih wa dima' wa fitna*).<sup>186</sup> However, the army managed to remain relatively united, and the civilian movement repeated the non-violent tactics of 1964. With the exception of a few outbreaks of vandalism in its initial stages, the April *Intifada* proved to be a remarkably pacific uprising, more so than the October Revolution.



The attacks on property that did occur were an extension of the demonstrators' protests against both the corruption of the regime and the programmes of economic privatization it had introduced in the years before its overthrow. During the rally led by the workers of Khartoum's principal industrial region, the protesters burned the Omdurman headquarters of the Wad Nimeiri society, which had become a symbol for the regime's corruption.<sup>187</sup> The same protesters burned the American flag outside the US Embassy, and also smashed the windows at Faisal Islamic Bank.<sup>188</sup> This was simultaneously a protest against the regime's policies of privatization and the leverage exercised by the Islamic Movement during the later years of the regime, since the bank was governed by senior *Ikhwan* politicians whose monopolistic practices had outraged the public.<sup>189</sup> In general, it seems that the buildings mainly targeted were those associated with the extremely wealthy – such as the Meridian Hotel, which was attacked on 27 March.<sup>190</sup> SSU buildings also came under attack in Omdurman and in Port Sudan.<sup>191</sup>

Besides these actions, the protesters committed relatively few attacks against either persons or property. In Port Sudan, the protesters adopted the slogan '[this is] not vandalism but [civil] disobedience' (*la takhrib bal isyan*).<sup>192</sup> There were no acts of aggression against bars or nightclubs, as these had been closed down following the declaration of *shari'a* in 1983. It is worth remarking that the most notable examples of non-violent protest were associated with non-Sudanese – for instance, it was a Palestinian studying at Omdurman Islamic University who provided a group of student protesters there with a Molotov cocktail, in spite of the union leadership's protests that this would provoke reprisals from the police.<sup>193</sup> This cameo highlighted the contrast between the relatively civil nature of the protest in urban Sudan and the extremes of political violence witnessed elsewhere in the Middle Eastern region.

Since both the army and the police had from an early stage resolved to take a comparatively passive stance towards the demonstrations, there were no particularly violent clashes between the protesters and either of these forces. As we have seen, the SSO agents took a less compromising attitude towards the protesters and infiltrated the crowds to shoot a number of them dead. As a result of this, angry crowds began to gather outside the SSO headquarters following the collapse of the regime demanding revenge for the casualties, but by the time the army intervened and occupied the building and arrested its personnel, only minor clashes and minor injuries had occurred.<sup>194</sup>

Thus it can be said that the regime's scaremongering was precisely that – scaremongering. The violence of the protesters represented a desire to re-balance a moral economy that had been distorted by government corruption and economic malpractice. There was no attempt to 'turn the world upside down', only to exact revenge against the existing government for its abuses. While the marginalized and displaced from Sudan's peripheries did participate in large numbers in the uprisings, neither the rebel groups nor regionalist movements associated with these parts of the country – which did aspire to achieve a far more substantial change in the social and economic order – played a significant role in determining the nature of the violence.



## Conclusion

Superficially, the April *Intifada* appeared to work out as an action replay of the October revolution. As in October, it began with a student demonstration in Khartoum, which led to violent clashes with the security forces. Just as in 1964, the urban professional groups then took up the mantle of protest and declared a general strike, which effectively paralysed economic life throughout the country. In both cases, casualties were limited, especially when compared to the popular insurrections in contemporary North Africa. The events of 1985 also resembled those of 1964 in that the civil unrest began in Khartoum and then spread outwards towards the other major northern towns. In 1985, as in 1964, the professional groups came together with the political parties to sign a 'National Charter', which demanded a restoration of democracy and basic human rights.

However, there were also noticeable differences. While both uprisings adopted anti-imperialist slogans, in 1985 there was a reaction to a much more significant foreign presence in Khartoum. While in October 1964 the demonstrators were attacking a government they perceived as a relic of a faded British colonialism, in 1985 they were protesting against a regime playing a very active role as a military client of the United States. The October Revolution was a purely domestic affair, but in 1985 the Americans helped to shape the course of events by delaying the return of Nimeiri from Washington. However, they did little else to control events. Although the story is plausible, it is difficult to know whether they genuinely came close to implementing a plan whereby Umar al-Tayyib would be installed as Nimeiri's replacement. Umar al-Tayyib himself may or may not have held such aspirations, but what can be said confidently is that he would never have had a sufficiently strong power base to take over by himself anyway. Therefore, while US intervention was a noticeable feature of the 1985 uprising, it was not a defining one.

Another new development in 1985 was the role played by the urban poor as well as rural migrants fleeing war and famine in Sudan's peripheries. The emergence of the '*shamasa*' phenomenon, although it illustrated a broader trend towards urban drift common to other post-colonial African states, also indicated the destructiveness of the regime's economic policy and its antipathy to the inhabitants of Sudan's rural peripheries. However, the impact of these marginalized groups upon the immediate outcome of the uprising was limited. They simply added manpower to an already vociferous protest. The leadership of the uprising was provided by the same elite social groups that had shepherded the crowds in 1964. What is perhaps more interesting is the manner in which the Nimeiri regime attempted to deter the historic inhabitants from demonstrating by depicting the demonstrations as the work of dangerous and uncivilized migrants from the countryside. This perhaps prefigures the current regime's strategy of undermining civilian opposition to the regime by fomenting a highly racialized distinction between the 'Arabs' of the towns and 'Africans' of the countryside. However, in 1985 these marginalized groups seem to have practised very little actual violence, if any at all, and their presence amidst the urban crowds did not discourage the rest of the urban population from joining in the uprising.

Another, perhaps slight, difference was the role played by religion and religious discourse in the uprising. On one level, the ideologies espoused by the protagonists in the 1985 uprising amounted to a rehashing of the slogans of the October events, such as political liberty and economic independence from the West. However, it is important to recognize the manner in which Nimeiri's introduction of the September Laws in 1983 redefined the nature of political debate in Sudan. A number of the political groups opposed to Nimeiri began to adopt religious discourses to criticize his efforts to justify his rule in Islamic terms. Again, this did not have any impact on the immediate outcome of the uprising but, as will be seen in Chapter 7, it proved to be highly significant for its aftermath.

Probably the most important of all the differences between 1964 and 1985 is the nature of the regime toppled. Abboud's regime, while not exactly popular, was nowhere near as personalized or oppressive as Nimeiri's. Moreover, Nimeiri's mismanagement of the economy – although compounded by wider global factors – ensured that his regime provoked the everyday Sudanese citizen in a manner in which his predecessor's had not. This reflected the extent to which the once charismatic president's physical malaise and increasing paranoia had hampered his ability to identify with his suffering people. It was this same paranoia that led the dictator to ruin the foundations of his own regime, marginalizing key institutions such as the army, police, judiciary and even his own political project, the Sudan Socialist Union. In the early stages of his period in power, Nimeiri had been a masterful political chameleon who was capable of playing separate parties, institutions, individuals and social and ethnic groups off against each other. However, from the late 1970s onwards, he marginalized more than he accommodated, and his mental instability undermined his instinctive survivalism. His over-dependence on his relationship with the ICF was politically suicidal, as was demonstrated when the Americans forced him to renege on his alliance with the Islamic Movement in March 1985, leaving him politically isolated.

Nimeiri thus brought about his own downfall, and that of the May Regime, in a way that Abboud did not. It is critical to acknowledge this because it goes some way to explaining why the overthrow of an autocratic one-party regime was possible in an age of advanced facilities of social control and limited international support for pro-democracy movements in Africa and the Middle East. However, what is remarkable about the *Intifada* is not the fact that it removed Nimeiri – it is the fact that it substituted a system of parliamentary democracy in his place. Nimeiri's self-annihilation alone did not guarantee the return of democracy. To understand why there was no simple transition to another military autocracy, we need to acknowledge the resilience of Sudan's political parties and understand the role played by students, professionals and labour activists in the civil protest in Sudan. This will be the focus of the next chapter.

## Communists, Islamists, Ba'athists and Sectarians: The Political Parties in 1964 and 1985

Middle Eastern analysts have argued that in the second half of the twentieth century, political parties identifying with a pluralist democratic system were not significant actors on the regional political scene.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Africanist literature for the most part treats multi-party politics as a serious phenomenon only after the great wave of liberalization in the 1990s.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, it is unsurprising, that a number, though not all, of the Sudanese participants and observers of the 1964 and 1985 uprisings have sought to downplay the role of the political parties.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, a number of factors should be taken into consideration before dismissing the role played by the parties in Sudan. First of all, the very fact that the two uprisings did succeed in returning genuine multi-party democracy to the country, albeit for relatively brief periods, ensured that none of the Sudanese parties spent as long a period in political occultation as their counterparts elsewhere in the region. Moreover, the two military regimes' experimentation with periods of 'liberalized autocracy' in which they co-opted different parties (or factions of parties) at different times also enabled these same parties to continue exercising influence.

The political parties that participated in the uprisings of both 1964 and 1985 shared a number of common features – first of all, they mainly traced their origins back to the late colonial period. Secondly, they all operated out of Khartoum and relied principally on a northern Sudanese constituency. However, a distinction is usually made between the modern ideological parties established by the educated elite of the University of Khartoum (Gordon College before independence), particularly the Sudan Communist Party and Muslim Brotherhood, and the so-called 'traditional' parties that were sponsored by the *Ansar* and Khatmiyya religious orders.

The 'traditional' parties included the *Umma* Party, which was established in 1945 by Sayyid Abd al-Rahman al-Mahdi, the Imam of the *Ansar* religious movement. The *Ansar* movement itself dates back to the 1880s, when it was founded by Muhammad Ahmad al-Mahdi, the grandfather of Sayyid Abd al-Rahman, to aid his war against the Turco-Egyptian colonizers of Sudan. Although the Mahdist *Ansar* were defeated by the British in 1898, Sayyid Abd al-Rahman developed an intimate relationship with the colonial administration and was able to rebuild the economic and political power of the *Ansar* movement, particularly through his patronage of various



cotton farming schemes on the White and Blue Niles. He used this power-base to campaign for Sudanese independence in the 1940s and 1950s. The Khatmiyya Sufi order, on account of its close commercial relationship with Egypt, sponsored rival political parties that supported unity between Egypt and Sudan. In 1944, Sayyid Ali al-Mirghani granted his support to the *Ashiqqa* ('blood brothers') party, which had been formed by young graduates in the previous year to advocate for unity with Egypt. This party had morphed into the National Unionist Party (NUP) by the time of the 1953 elections, and its leader Isma'il al-Azhari became Sudan's first prime minister after having abandoned the principle of amalgamation with the country's northern neighbour. In 1957, a rift within the party led to a splinter movement forming the People's Democratic Party (PDP), which drew the support of the majority of the Khatmiyya. The party was still split at the time of the October Revolution of 1964, but the two rival groups amalgamated themselves into the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) in 1967.

These parties consistently outperformed the more 'ideological' parties at the polls during elections in Sudan's periods of multi-party parliamentary democracy between 1953–8, 1964–9 and 1986–9, reflecting the influential presence of the *Ansar* and the Khatmiyya in the rural areas of northern, eastern, western and central Sudan. However, they found it much harder to obtain the support of Sudan's educated elites, who tended to identify with the ideological movements emanating from the wider Arab world in the second half of the twentieth century. Sudanese students who had completed educations in Egypt brought back with them the ideals of the Egyptian communists and the Muslim Brotherhood, although the local ideological movements that began to emerge as a result in the 1940s usually had a specifically Sudanese outlook. The Islamic Liberation Movement, which was established by Babikir Karrar in 1948, became the most dominant faction among the various Sudanese groupings influenced by Egyptian political Islam. Karrar clashed with individuals such as Ali Talaballah who believed that the Sudanese movement should incorporate itself into the Egyptian parent organization.<sup>4</sup> In spite of the desires of the Sudanese Islamists to be not too closely identified with the Egyptian movement, in 1955 they established an 'Executive Bureau' to represent the Muslim Brotherhood (*Ikhwan al-Muslimun*) in Sudan, which would elect a 'general supervisor' (*muraqib al-aam*).<sup>5</sup> This 'executive bureau' would sponsor a number of political parties – the ILM between 1955 and 1964, the Islamic Charter Front (ICF) between 1964 and 1985 and the National Islamic Front (NIF) between 1985 and 1989. Confusingly, these parties are usually referred to by non-Islamists as the 'Muslim Brotherhood', although there were a number of other factions, such as Babikir Karrar's Islamic Socialist Party (formed in 1964) and Sadiq Abdullah's Muslim Brotherhood, that also identified with the original movement. Further terminological confusion followed Hasan al-Turabi's decision to rename the Muslim Brotherhood organization the 'Islamic Movement' following the 1964 Revolution to emphasize the uniqueness of the Sudanese Islamist experience<sup>6</sup> – many of the movement's opponents continued to use the 'Brotherhood' label. The Sudan Communist Party emerged in a fashion similar to that of the various Islamist parties, being established by Sudanese students in Cairo as a branch of the Egyptian Communist Party in 1944, and then emerging as a movement in its own right in 1946 when it founded the Sudanese Movement



for National Liberation.<sup>7</sup> This party was outlawed by the British colonial government, the Sudanese parliamentary regime that followed it and Abboud's military regime.<sup>8</sup> As such, it already had a long history of underground political activity by the time of the October Revolution.

Just as was the case in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, the various political parties made a variety of highly contested claims regarding their participation in the 1964 and 1985 uprisings. Representatives of these parties have frequently attempted to claim that their political opponents had either failed to contribute to the civilian insurrections, or actively opposed them. When specific parties maintained that their rivals had 'opposed' the uprisings, what this often really meant was that they opposed the vision of the Revolution that they had tried to create during the transitional periods (see Chapters 6 and 7). Meanwhile, political 'neutrals' who were not members of these parties have tended to insist that the role of the political parties was irrelevant to the outcome of the Revolution, and to highlight the role of the professional elites, or the 'Sudanese people' in general. A number of politicians in their dotage such as Muhammad Ibrahim Nurg and Hasan al-Turabi now downplay the role of their own parties – although the latter perhaps has his own motives for doing so.

A number of the accusations that specific parties 'opposed' either the 1964 or 1985 uprisings highlight the relationship of these parties with the state in 1964 and 1985. Both the SCP in 1964 and ICF in 1985 were accused of having been 'in cahoots' with the defunct regimes following their overthrows. While it will be seen that the ICF had a closer, if not necessarily a more harmonious, relationship with Nimeiri in 1985 than the SCP did with Abboud in 1964, we must beware of establishing binary models of 'collaboration' or 'opposition'. As Sami Zubaida has observed, the state in the Middle East is not so much a homogeneous entity as a 'political field' in which various social and political factions compete for influence.<sup>9</sup> Nimeiri's state was particularly porous in this regard. All the major northern political groups – the Umma, DUP, ICF, SCP, Ba'athists and Nasserists – either actively identified with it or drew support from it at some point. Most parties oscillated between seeking absorption within the state or actively seeking to overthrow it, which was the cause of much internal factionalism within these same parties.

### Hasan al-Turabi, the *Ikhwan* and campus mobilization

Debates over the role of the Muslim Brotherhood in 1964 tend to focus on the actions of Hasan al-Turabi, which, as illustrated in Chapter 1, were genuinely significant. A number of sympathetic sources insist that al-Turabi was enacting the calculated strategy of the Muslim Brotherhood's executive bureau, and highlight the agency of other individuals affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood in the early stages of the Revolution. Other accounts – including (at times) al-Turabi's own – contend that he was acting as a solitary professional and not as a member of any political organization. For instance, Eisa points to the fact that during the famous seminar of 10 September when al-Turabi delivered his famous address, he did so as an expert on constitutional law recently returned from the Sorbonne, and not as a member of the Muslim

Brotherhood, which was already represented by Uthman Khalid Medawi.<sup>10</sup> Al-Turabi himself claimed in 2011 'I witnessed October, but the organization to which I belong did not entrust me to do anything'.<sup>11</sup> This was a markedly different position to that which he advanced as leader of the NIF in the late 1980s, when he attributed to the Islamists the greatest contribution to the success of the Revolution.<sup>12</sup>

Theorists who posit that it is a charismatic individual rather than a rational political framework that determines the activity of Islamist social movements<sup>13</sup> might accept al-Turabi's assertion that his actions during the Revolution were spontaneous and autonomous. Nevertheless, this claim needs to be examined in light of the history of his own relationship with the Brotherhood. Although he had been a leading party member before his postgraduate studies and had headed the *Ikhwan's* political office at the University of Khartoum before his graduation, his PhD at the Sorbonne – which was completed only 2 months before the Revolution – had taken him out of the limelight.<sup>14</sup> Thus, it was not until the subsequent transitional period that al-Turabi catapulted himself into the political arena with the formation of the Islamic Charter Front. This represented a political split with the old Islamic Liberation Movement headed by Babikir Karrar, which reformed itself as the Islamic Socialist Party following the October Revolution.<sup>15</sup> Throughout the rest of the 1960s, al-Turabi was the principal architect of the efforts to engage the Brotherhood (now renamed as the Islamic Movement) more directly in the political arena, which led him into conflict with 'educationalists' who eschewed such an approach.<sup>16</sup> This is perhaps why he viewed the Revolution from such an individual perspective. His subsequent political career perhaps exploited the kudos he received for his role in the Revolution. He himself admits that up until October 1964 'I never thought I would leave my academic career'.<sup>17</sup>

Given that al-Turabi would spend the following decades endeavouring to guide and reshape the Sudanese Muslim Brotherhood in accordance with his own philosophy, it is not unsurprising that he attributes more to his role as an individual rather than a party member at this time. He insists that during al-Qurayshi's funeral march on 22 October, he approached police who were planning to break up the demonstration and warned them off such an action, observing that Europeans were in the crowd and stating 'if you kill them do you think your government will enjoy this?'<sup>18</sup> Sympathetic accounts also place a heavy emphasis on his role in addressing the crowds following the prayers over al-Qurayshi's body in the Midan Abd al-Mun'im. Shamouq recalls that al-Turabi responded to the crowds' chants for revenge and the removal of the military dictatorship by picking up a microphone and declaring in what Shamouq describes as a 'voice close to a blazing roar' that 'the lecturers' board will lead the struggle and rapid decisions will be taken so that we avenge the martyr against the traitors'.<sup>19</sup> Al-Turabi argues that he was speaking purely in his role as a lecturer at this point,<sup>20</sup> although according to Shamouq, the two figures who followed him in addressing the crowds were also Muslim Brothers, the KUSU President Rabie Hasan Ahmad and student warden Hasan Umar.<sup>21</sup>

While al-Turabi and his acolytes have made it a political practice to aggrandize his reputation, it should be recognized that his role in the October Revolution is well acknowledged by neutrals and even political opponents. Senior Umma Party man Abd al-Hamid Fadl, a student leader during the events of October 1964, recalls

that al-Turabi 'has about 70 per cent in the Revolution' and that during this period 'the people admired him' (*nas mulajjibin bihu*).<sup>22</sup> 'The steam of the Revolution was injected by Dr al-Turabi, I must be honest', recalls former leftist Ghazi Suleiman, a member of KUSU at the time of October, '...we all admired him'.<sup>23</sup> Al-Turabi, alongside Ali Muhammad Khair, was one of the first lecturers to reach the university after the shooting occurred and help in ferrying wounded students to the hospital.<sup>24</sup> It appears that the students raised al-Turabi on their shoulders during the demonstration in Abd al-Muni'im Square.<sup>25</sup>

SCP member Fathi Fadl – who was a part of the KUSU executive committee in October 1964 – admits that in his speech in the Midan Abd al-Muni'im, al-Turabi 'made a very courageous statement challenging everything', although, voicing a claim made by a number of al-Turabi's left-wing critics, he argues that he subsequently called for the students to disperse. Neither al-Turabi nor any of his supporters have responded convincingly to this criticism.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, one might read his declaration to the crowd (quoted by Shamouq) that 'you will find us [i.e. the lecturer's board] more eager than you to avenge the blood of the martyr'<sup>27</sup> as an indication that al-Turabi was still keen to keep the anti-regime protest within the university, fearing that mobilization of the urban population at large might lead to a left-wing takeover of the Revolution. If this is the case, ironically, his fears were not shared by his fellow Muslim Brother, the university warden Hasan Umar. A number of Islamist and non-Islamist sources, including Fathi Fadl, acknowledge that he was the one who provoked the subsequent protests by the crowds by grabbing the microphone from al-Turabi and declaring 'the November gang must fall'.<sup>28</sup> This itself suggests that because of the spontaneity of the Revolution, and probably also the divisions within the Brotherhood at the time, Sudan's Islamists were not acting with one voice. While al-Turabi's actions implied a more cautious strategy, Umar's exhibited a radical outlook.

However ambiguous his political status was during the Revolution, al-Turabi was nevertheless pursuing the broad interests of Sudan's Islamists. His secularist opponents have claimed that, far from acting as a neutral professional, he consciously switched the professionals' meeting place from the Lecturers' Club to the Doctors' Union headquarters on 26 October so as to confuse the SCP. Moreover, they maintain that he used the opportunity to increase Muslim Brotherhood representation in the Front by appointing, among others, Abd al-Rahim Hamdi as head of a (rapidly contrived) 'finance ministry inspectors' union'.<sup>29</sup> Al-Turabi's participation in the team sent by the UNF to negotiate with Abboud further illustrates the ambiguity of his role. Sadiq al-Mahdi, who joined the delegation on behalf of the Umma Party, claims that al-Turabi was representing the Muslim Brotherhood.<sup>30</sup> Ahmad al-Amin Abd al-Rahman, in whose house a crucial meeting of the Professional Front was held on 27 December, also insists that 'Hasan al-Turabi was supposed to be representing our group the professionals, but here he was playing the role of the Muslim Brotherhood'.<sup>31</sup> This represents a key example of how members of the political parties captured the professional movement during the Revolution.

It is more than possible that al-Turabi may have downplayed the extent to which his actions during the Revolution were a product of party policy. El-Affendi, in a thoroughly researched, if somewhat sympathetic, book based on numerous interviews



with members of the Islamic Movement, claims that al-Turabi's famous speech on 10 September was a direct result of decisions made within the Muslim Brotherhood's sixth *shura* [consultative] council during June 1964 to mobilize dissent against the regime.<sup>32</sup> He also maintains that the *Ikhwan* had been pursuing a large scale anti-regime pamphleteering campaign since July 1964, and that it was the Executive Bureau of the Muslim Brotherhood which took a tactical decision to step up its rhetoric at the next seminar held at the University of Cairo (Khartoum Branch), in which Muhammad Salih Umar and Ali Abdullah Yaqub represented the *Ikhwanis*.<sup>33</sup> He further represents the decision of the *Ikhwanis* members of KUSU to press for the organization of further seminars as being in line with this overall policy.<sup>34</sup> The agency of the Brotherhood was implicitly acknowledged by its critics at the time, such as Ahmad Ali Baggadi, who following the debates held at the University of Cairo Khartoum Branch accused Muhammad Salih Umar of exploiting the southern issue for political purposes.<sup>35</sup>

This would seem to suggest that the Brotherhood had a more active role in provoking the October Revolution than al-Turabi now acknowledges. Although the November Regime's battle against the SCP has received more attention because of the global political situation at the time and it is true that Abboud's government arrested far more communists than it did *Ikhwanis*, the Brotherhood had nevertheless been active in its opposition to the Abboud Regime from an early stage. In 1959, Rashid al-Tahir, the leader of the *Ikhwan*, was arrested by the government for sponsoring the attempted coup that had led to a number of young officers being hanged in 1959.<sup>36</sup> As seen in Chapter 1, the Brotherhood had campaigned throughout Abboud's tenure against what they perceived to be the sexual immorality of senior junta members. In 1962, al-Turabi utilized a period of extended study leave in Khartoum to propose a strategy of backing resistance to the regime through support of the Front of Opposition Parties.<sup>37</sup> However, in spite of its opposition to the regime, the Muslim Brotherhood does not appear to have been seen as a particularly prominent player at the time. It was not invited to join the FOP when it was originally formed in 1960, which appeared to reflect the other opposition parties' refusal to take it seriously.<sup>38</sup> The movement itself had little presence outside Khartoum University.<sup>39</sup> It did not seem likely that it would be responsible for initiating any successful anti-regime agitation – unless, of course, the epicentre of the movement was Khartoum University, as was the case on 21 October 1964.

The part played by other prominent Muslim Brotherhood lecturers at the university, and al-Turabi's coordination with them, to some extent belies his claim that he was acting purely as an individual professional. Sympathetic accounts claim that the two Muslim Brotherhood lecturers at the university who became involved in demanding a protest by the university to the government immediately after the shooting of al-Qurayshi were Muhammad Salih Umar and Abd al-Rahim Hamdi.<sup>40</sup> Al-Turabi has had political splits with both these figures since, and it is thus unsurprising that he has not been quick to acknowledge their role.<sup>41</sup> Muhammad Salih Umar was a lecturer who had already spoken in the 10 September seminar, while al-Hamdi was an economics expert who would later go on to become the pioneer of Islamic banking in Sudan. Muhammad Salih Umar collaborated particularly closely with al-Turabi in the early days of the Revolution, helping him to negotiate the course of al-Qurayshi's funeral



procession on 22 October with the police.<sup>42</sup> Turabi himself admits, upon being pressed, that 'to some extent me and Muhammad Salih Umar were co-ordinating'.<sup>43</sup>

The fact that so many *Ikhwani* lecturers were involved in the protest at the university enabled them to formulate on the spot political strategies that would suit their movement. According to Shamouq, al-Turabi made a particularly significant political decision on the night of 21 October, which he discussed with three other Muslim Brother lecturers present at Khartoum hospital – Hamdi, Umar and Ahmad al-Tijani Salih. This was his decision to contact the leaders of the other outlawed political parties. Shamouq claims that this occurred after the four had decided to reject a proposal made by the SCP through Uthman Medawi that only the graduate political forces, in other words the Muslim Brotherhood and the communists, should lead the Revolution.<sup>44</sup> Rabie Hasan Ahmad offers a very similar version of this account, arguing that the Muslim Brothers present at the hospital on the night of 21 October took the decision to contact the other parties for fear that the communists would take over the Revolution.<sup>45</sup> It seems that al-Turabi pursued a similar strategy throughout this decisive period of the Revolution. Abu Eissa, a former secretary of the Professional Front, now suggests that it was al-Turabi who bore the greatest responsibility for the decision to merge the Professional Front – which represented the graduate political forces and came increasingly to be influenced by the SCP as the Revolution progressed – with the representatives of the political parties to form the United National Front in the week following the University Incident.<sup>46</sup>

Such policies would have made good political sense at the time for Muslim Brotherhood politicians, since their presence among the educated elite, while far from negligible, was not quite as strong as that of the SCP. Moreover, they shared considerably more ideological ground with the 'traditional forces', the Umma and NUP, than their leftist rivals did. It would have fitted in with the political strategy proposed by al-Turabi at a Muslim Brotherhood assembly in 1962, whereby the *Ikhwan* should see itself as a kind of 'intellectual pressure group', acting, in el-Affendi's words, 'through all parties and on all of them'.<sup>47</sup> The effectiveness of this policy would later be illustrated by the alliance that the Brotherhood would form with the Umma and the NUP during the 1964–5 interim period.<sup>48</sup>

It is important to bear in mind that the role of the Muslim Brotherhood in effecting anti-regime action was largely restricted to mobilization within the university and professional headquarters. Although the *Ikhwanis* were, in general, less firmly established than the SCP within the educated elite at large, they were dependent on the graduate sectors for what influence they did have. It is worth noting that while Shamouq's broadly pro-*Ikhwani* account of the Revolution focuses a great deal on events on the Khartoum campus, it offers very little detail about the unfolding of the Revolution after al-Qurayshi's funeral procession on 22 October. Before 1979, no radical Islamist movement had successfully organized a popular revolution. Al-Turabi laments the fact that at this time the SCP had more understanding of how to organize revolutions, not from experience in Sudan but through lessons drawn from Russia.<sup>49</sup> The Brotherhood had no such reference point. Al-Turabi distances himself and the *Ikhwan* from the 'To the palace and to victory' march, attributing its inspiration mainly to Babikir Awadallah.<sup>50</sup> This would suggest that the Brotherhood had little interest in

radicalizing the Revolution through popular mobilization and that its focus was on the manipulation of elite politics.

The members of the Islamic Liberation Movement who were most visible in the midst of the protests following 22 October were those who would split with al-Turabi and form a separate Islamic Socialist Party after the Revolution. One co-founder of the party, al-Mirghani al-Nasri, was one of the most active members of the Bar Association at the time and some former Islamic Socialists now claim (although with little evidence) that it was he who proposed the general strike.<sup>51</sup> The other, Babikir Karrar, thrust himself into the thick of events during the government press conference of 24 October, responding to the minister of interior's announcement that the protests could be dealt with by the usual police methods by declaring 'this is a popular revolution demanding freedom and democracy and it will be hard to crush it'.<sup>52</sup> Again, this serves as a reminder that the Brotherhood was split between radical and more conservative factions at the time of the Revolution.

It is difficult to deny that the political strategy of the Muslim Brotherhood did have a significant impact on the manner in which the October Revolution unfolded. It cannot be said that the movement planned the Revolution in precise detail – as seen in Chapter 1, the actual series of events that gave birth to it were far from predictable. However, it seems likely that it had consciously stepped up its campaign against the regime in the months preceding the Revolution. The actions of Muhammad Salih Umar and Hasan al-Turabi, if they were not influenced directly by the policy of the Executive Bureau, were taken with the interests of their party in mind, and were not simply those of individual professionals. In like fashion, it will be seen in Chapter 4 that Muslim Brotherhood affiliates in KUSU were, at least to some extent, guided by the interests and policy of their party in the lead-up to the famous seminar of 21 October.

### A revolution of the people, or the *petit bourgeois*? The SCP in 1964

There is a tendency for scholars working in the wider field of Middle Eastern studies to assume a direct causal link between the growing strength of the SCP, which vied with the Brotherhood for leadership of the 'modern forces', and the outbreak of the October Revolution. For instance, Ismael, observing that SCP party membership grew from 750 in 1958 to between 3,000 and 10,000 in 1965, claims that 'In the summer of 1964, the SCP led preparations for a general strike, concentrating on securing the support of the workers, peasants, students and professionals'.<sup>53</sup> Nevertheless, the role of the SCP during the October Revolution remains shrouded in controversy.

The party's critics, in particular its political opponents on the religious right, have charged it with being surprised by, and initially unsympathetic to, the popular insurrection.<sup>54</sup> Hamad contends that the SCP felt threatened by the predominance of the Muslim Brotherhood in KUSU and the emergence of the Professional Front as a challenge to its influence among the unions.<sup>55</sup> He further argues that the SCP had moved closer to the regime on account of Abboud's decision to forge closer ties with

Brezhnev earlier in the year, and had illustrated this proximity with their decision to participate in the elections for the Central Council and local councils.<sup>56</sup> This criticism is perhaps slightly over-egged; the Umma Party politician Muhammad Mahgub, while critical of the SCP decision to participate in the Central Council elections, admits that they 'maintained that they should participate for tactical reasons as the elections gave them a good political platform' and many other non-SCP figures acknowledge their motives in this regard.<sup>57</sup> The same argument is made by a number of former SCP politicians, who contend that election rallies in 1963 provided them with the opportunity to criticize the regime in public in a manner that would not have been possible had they not accepted the process.<sup>58</sup> The SCP was not allied with Abboud's regime in the manner that the ICF would be allied with Nimeiri in 1977–85. While the May Regime appointed Islamist ministers and pursued Islamist policies in this period, between 1963 and 1964 Abboud's regime neither granted SCP politicians portfolios nor implemented a communist political programme.

In 1981, the ex-communist Ahmad Sulayman, while critical of the SCP decision to participate in the Central Council elections, admitted that Abd al-Khaliq Mahgub had justified it as part of a strategy of 'bringing down the system from within', and that the SCP chairman had referenced Lenin's tactic of joining the Russian *Duma* in 1907.<sup>59</sup> The party's participation in the Central Council was not, therefore, a comprehensive endorsement of the November Regime – they were, perhaps, 'best enemies'. Sulayman also claims that one faction within the SCP, led by Mu'awiya Ibrahim and himself, opposed the Central Committee's decision.<sup>60</sup> However, such claims should be regarded with some suspicion given Sulayman's own conflict with and departure from the SCP in 1970. Farouk Abu Eissa – who also seceded with Sulayman in 1970 – denies that there was any such conflict in 1963.<sup>61</sup>

The SCP faced many of the charges of having been 'surprised by' or even opposed to, the popular uprising, soon after its success. It therefore produced its own history of events, entitled *Thawrat al-Sha'ab* (*The People's Revolution*), to rebut claims that it had entered the Revolution opportunistically and only when it had become clear that the regime could not survive. First of all, the book reproduced the text of a circular issued by the general secretariat of the SCP to its branch organizations dated 17 August 1964 criticizing the regime's economic policy and arguing that Sudan had become a debtor state, so as to demonstrate that the party remained opposed to the regime. It also reprinted the text of an SCP pamphlet from 22 October 1964, addressed to the 'masses of the working classes' (*jamahir al-tabaqat al-'amila*), condemning al-Qurayshi's shooting, and encouraging the workers, farmers, students and graduates to do away with the regime.<sup>62</sup> However, what is noticeable is that *Thawrat al-Sha'ab*, in spite of its considerable length, makes little reference to the seminar of 21 October, implicitly conceding the fact that the SCP did little to provoke the event that provided the ultimate spark for the October Revolution. Since this seminar was organized on the initiative of a student union that was (albeit narrowly) dominated by the Muslim Brotherhood's political wing at the university (see Chapter 4), it is unsurprising that *Thawrat al-Sha'ab* devotes little time to it. Instead, 450 of its 500 pages focus on the various struggles of the SCP and its affiliated trade unions against the regime *before* October.



Given that the party had only a limited involvement in the decisive seminar, communist sources tend to argue that it was the SCP that prepared the country for the Revolution over a period of long-term struggle, and that the clash at the university on 21 October was simply the 'straw that broke the camel's back'.<sup>63</sup> Ali Kinein contends that although the communists had been calling for a political strike since 1961, they never established a fixed hour for this to occur, since this 'only happens in military coups'.<sup>64</sup> Indeed, the fact that the original call for a political strike was issued by the political office of the Sudan Communist Party through its underground media organ *al-Shiyu'i* on 28 August 1961 (later reproduced in *Thawrat al-Sha'ab*) does seem to vindicate this argument. The political office declared in this pamphlet that it would be the working class (*al-tabaqa al-hamila*), the farmers, the students and the 'national bourgeoisie' (*al-bourgeoisyya al-wataniyya*), who would generate the strike.<sup>65</sup> Specifically, it announced that '[t]he party sees that it is by engaging in constant daily activity among these forces that it is possible to mobilize for a general political strike which if it were to happen would paralyse the current regime completely'.<sup>66</sup> The article did, indeed, give no set date for the execution of the political strike. Instead, it asked rhetorically, 'Is it possible to fix a specific day for [the execution of] the general strike in the whole country?'<sup>67</sup> The answer was 'This of course we cannot do now. Once more the importance of organization is prominent – it is not possible to fix a specific day for the movement without establishing revolutionary organizations which lead it and mobilize for it and it is probable that there will not be any specification [of the date] until after these organizations were established...organizational and political mobilization for the general strike will determine what it is necessary to do at the appropriate moment'.<sup>68</sup>

However, it seems that the SCP recognized at this time that the party was too weakly established to lead this revolutionary struggle alone. It would claim in *Thawrat al-Sha'ab* that it approached the other opposition parties on two occasions, both immediately after the initial call for a general strike in 1961 and again in January 1962, after the release of the opposition politicians from Juba, but that these parties turned down its proposals.<sup>69</sup> A meeting of the Central Committee on 6 January 1963 acknowledged that the SCP could not instigate change acting solo. The first point made in the summary of the meeting – again reproduced in *Thawrat al-Sha'ab* – was that 'The Sudan Communist Party is unable to change this regime by itself'.<sup>70</sup> It is worth remembering that while the SCP was regarded as an extremely important, if clandestine, actor in the Sudanese political arena at the time, the actual party membership was still very limited and its prestige was based mainly on its general influence over the student movement and the workers' and professionals' unions.<sup>71</sup>

Thus, while the SCP may have been the first party to adopt the slogan of the 'political strike', they foresaw a long period of preparation and were highly wary of taking any form of premature action. In October 1963, the central secretariat responded negatively to the efforts of 'extreme leftists' of the Blue Nile Province party leadership, which under Yusuf Abd al-Majid had seceded from the main party, to mobilize a regional 'general political strike'.<sup>72</sup> The Blue Nile Province leadership had asserted that the province had reached 'the point of revolutionary outbreak' and that on this basis 'it is our central and immediate responsibility to unleash the strike battle which has been planned on a



popular level everywhere in the province.<sup>73</sup> The SCP leadership published its response to this action in an edition of *al-Shiyu'i* dated 14 October 1963:

There are left wing statements being made regarding a general political strike in all the publications in the province. The leadership of the province considers that a general political strike is something that is to be carried out instantaneously and directly ... the general political strike cannot happen in one province only without the other provinces going along with it, and in the first place it is not possible for one province to decide in an isolated manner that the circumstances have become ripe for it.<sup>74</sup>

However, the SCP insisted in *Thawrat al-Sha'ab* that the death of al-Qurayshi on 21 October did, indeed, provide the 'spark' that it had been hoping for. It argued that 'it is clear to us that the opening of fire at the university and the death of the first martyr Ahmad al-Qurayshi would not have led to the outbreak of a revolution had it not been for the fact that the revolutionary crisis had matured and had become completely widespread.'<sup>75</sup> This was in itself a result of the 'accumulation of the struggles of the revolutionary classes.'<sup>76</sup> Abd al-Khaliq Mahgub would claim in 1965 that since August 1964, the party had felt that the country was 'approaching a change.'<sup>77</sup> However, neither account discussed the role that the SCP 'revolutionary committees' or other party branches played in provoking the events of 21 October, or attempted to explain how the events leading up to al-Qurayshi's death at the seminar were in any way a result of the SCP's call for a general political strike. This again represents an implicit concession that the SCP did little to bring about the incident at the university. This point will be further illustrated in the next chapter.

While they may not have initiated the Revolution in a direct sense, the communists do not seem to have been any slower than the other political forces in responding to it. As mentioned above, Shamouq claims that the SCP sent a message via Uthman Medawi to Khartoum University's Muslim Brother lecturers at the hospital on the night of 21 October, requesting that the *Ikhwan* refrain from encouraging the traditional political parties to participate in the Revolution and thus allow themselves and the SCP, as the two parties with most leverage over the 'modern forces', to take the leading role.<sup>78</sup> Although it might seem strange that the SCP should approach the Brotherhood in this way, it is worth considering that elements within the *Ikhwan* were influenced by socialist thought at the time and this move would have fitted in with the party's political strategy, since it had in the later years of Abboud's regime maintained a policy of avoiding alliances with the established parties and, instead, mobilizing support from among the workers, farmers, students and professionals.<sup>79</sup> Although the Brotherhood was the SCP's strongest competitor for influence among the 'modern forces', the SCP would have dominated any revolutionary front that incorporated these two parties alone. Even though it appears that this advance was rebuffed by al-Turabi and his fellow *Ikhwani* lecturers, Abd al-Khaliq Mahgub did participate in the funeral procession on 22 October.<sup>80</sup>

If the Revolution is viewed as a whole – rather than through the lens of its catalytic event, the University Incident – then the SCP comes more noticeably into the foreground. As further protests erupted, the role of the communists gradually eclipsed

that of the Brotherhood, which was at its strongest in the University of Khartoum itself. Warburg argues that the communists reached the apex of their influence after the declaration of the political strike by Abdin Isma'il of the pro-communist Bar Association on 24 October, using their sway over the unions to generalize the dissent.<sup>81</sup> Ahmad al-Amin Abd al-Rahman, while not particularly sympathetic to the SCP, acknowledges that it played a major role in facilitating the general strike and mobilizing propaganda in support of the Professional Front.<sup>82</sup> Abd al-Khaliq Mahgub would claim in 1965 that the SCP inspired the decision to declare a general strike after a party delegation met the chief lawyers Abdin Isma'il and Farouk Abu Eissa and told them 'that the path is prepared for it and that the party is prepared to make it succeed'.<sup>83</sup> Farouk Abu Eissa states that it was Abd al-Khaliq who drove him to the meeting at the Bar Association headquarters immediately following the funeral procession of 22 October, although he reports that he 'disappeared' after dropping him off, which would suggest that he recognized the importance of leaving the anti-regime mobilization to the professionals.<sup>84</sup>

There has, nevertheless, been something of a tendency among various observers to look to the political status of the party and exaggerate its significance as a consequence. British embassy sources also attributed to it a substantial role in mobilizing the crowds, blaming 'communist organizers' for marshalling the repeated surges towards the Republican Palace that provoked the army's fateful burst of fire on 28 October.<sup>85</sup> External observers often blame local unrest on easily identifiable political actors, and this risks denying the spontaneity with which members of the public took to the streets. It is quite possible that the unions would have followed the call for a general strike without direct instigation by the communists, as would be the case in 1985. Although most sources accept that the SCP played a significant role in generalizing the strike, it is also believed by some that the general strike was initially proposed not by a communist, but by the Ba'athist lawyer Shawgi Mallasi on 22 October.<sup>86</sup> It was the two judges, Babikir Awadallah and Abd al-Majid Imani, who were most visible during the 'Towards the Palace' march of 28 October – at which point the most active communists, including Ahmad Sulayman and Farouk Abu Eissa, were engaged in negotiations either with the parties or the military.<sup>87</sup>

Senior SCP figures have themselves – albeit rather inconsistently – attempted to downplay their role in the Revolution, partly because of disillusionment with its failings. In 1967, the SCP distanced itself from the claim that it had spearheaded the Revolution when the party secretariat lamented following its fourth annual conference of 1967 that it had been led by the 'petit bourgeoisie'.<sup>88</sup> Mahjub Sharif, who is renowned for his composition of popular songs concerning the Revolution, admits 'Although I am a communist now no-one can say we were leading. I cannot say that there were not Muslim Brothers, they were two groups within the whole people'.<sup>89</sup> Even Muhammad Ibrahim Nugd, who replaced Abd al-Khaliq Mahgub as the leader of the Sudan Communist Party in 1971, observed shortly before his death in 2012 that 'we do not claim that we made October ... but we were a part in it'.<sup>90</sup>

One reason that the SCP leadership now downplays its contribution to the Revolution might be the fact that it was seen by some that it was the 'secessionists' – that is, those who chose to leave the party and side with Nimeiri following his rift

with the SCP in 1970 – who were at the forefront of the anti-regime mobilization in 1964.<sup>91</sup> In particular, this group included the three most influential communists in the Bar Association – Ahmad Sulayman, Farouk Abu Eissa and Abdin Isma'il. Although the last of these three was not a full member of the party, all of them shared close social and professional links, played a crucial part as professionals in organizing dissent against Abboud and would abandon the SCP and side with Nimeiri in 1970.<sup>92</sup> Ahmad Sulayman himself was in prison at the time the Revolution broke out, for having protested along with Abu Eissa against the judiciary's decision to try a number of young SCP members.<sup>93</sup> It is perhaps because these secessionists were so significant that the October Revolution is celebrated in a somewhat more lukewarm fashion by the party today than it was in 1964.

Although the Muslim Brotherhood might have helped to shape the immediate events that brought about the Revolution, the SCP probably provided it with its broader context. While the party's decision to advocate a general strike in 1961 did not directly inspire what occurred in October 1964, the fact that it had been promoting the idea of revolutionary action among its affiliates in the labour and professional movement ensured that – though it may not have directly provoked the civilian uprising – it was able to react to it and mobilize its supporters against the regime with some degree of rapidity. This said, the SCP did not have a monopoly on anti-government mobilization in 1964. Men affiliated to Arab nationalist parties also played a significant role in promoting civil disobedience in 1964.

## Arab nationalists and the October Revolution

While communism and Arab nationalism may have represented divergent political trends in the rest of the Middle East, in Sudan, the role of the various Ba'athist and Arab nationalist groups to some extent complemented that of the SCP. In a country where parties controlled by 'sectarian' religious movements wielded a major influence, these parties' shared secularism and self-perception as 'vanguard' organizations created a common ground, particularly in the context of professional mobilization.

The first Arab nationalist organization to be established in Sudan was the 'Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party' founded by Shawgi Mallasi in the University of Cairo (Khartoum Branch) in 1957. This was quickly followed by a variety of other organizations in the various secondary schools in northern Sudan, and an 'Arab Socialist Front' in the University of Khartoum in 1961.<sup>94</sup> These organizations were politically very active, and organized demonstrations following the downfall of the United Arab Republic in 1961 and the Ba'ath Party coup in Iraq in 1963 that would lead to clashes with the police and the arrest of a number of their cadres.<sup>95</sup> However, they were still weakly established among the student body in general and the events of 1961 and 1963 led to severe divisions between the Ba'athist and Nasserist factions.<sup>96</sup>

The Arab nationalists' contribution to the October Revolution, while not a decisive one, outweighed their relatively insignificant position within the country at large. It was a member of the Arab Socialist Front, Abdullah Abd al-Rahman, who organized the very first debate on the southern question at the University of Khartoum in



1964, which aroused the interest of a great number of southerners and students and witnessed 'lively discussion'.<sup>97</sup> Lawmen affiliated to the Arab nationalist movement were also at the forefront of the campaign for civil disobedience, particularly the judge Babikir Awadallah and Shawgi Mallasi, the original founder of the Ba'ath at the University of Khartoum.<sup>98</sup> These individuals, in collaboration with their more left-wing colleagues, appear to have played the leading role in organizing the lawyers' and judges' protest, which led to Awadallah's imprisonment on 25 October.<sup>99</sup> While the Arab nationalists represented the only major northern political movement to be left out of the negotiations with Abboud, al-Turabi argues that it was for precisely this reason that Awadallah, who had recently been released from jail, whipped up the protests that eventually led to the 'Towards the Palace and to Victory' march.<sup>100</sup> It is worth bearing in mind that Babikir Awadallah had, since 22 October, been among those most keen to keep the leadership of the Revolution in the hands of the professional unions, which could probably be explained by the fact that the Arab nationalist ideology had little support outside of this branch of the 'modern forces'.<sup>101</sup> In this sense, his contributions were simultaneously the most elitist and the most radical.

### The neglected role of the 'traditional parties'

The standard claim of Marxist historians is that the October Revolution was 'opposed by traditional parties linked to the main religious groups, Mahdiyya and Khatmiyya'.<sup>102</sup> The 'traditional forces', comprising the Umma, PDP and NUP, have frequently been accused of exploiting an urban revolution manufactured by political forces more sophisticated than themselves by utilizing the patrimonial, commercial and sectarian ties that connected them to their massive rural support bases to seize power when 'one man one vote' elections occurred.<sup>103</sup> While there is an element of truth to this, it seems that these parties reacted just as swiftly to the revolution in Khartoum as the SCP did. As seen above, Shamouq argues that it was al-Turabi and his fellow Muslim Brother lecturers who played the key role in bringing senior Umma and NUP figures such as al-Sadiq al-Mahdi and Isma'il al-Azhari to the hospital.<sup>104</sup> However, Sadiq al-Mahdi denied this in an interview given in 2011,<sup>105</sup> although it is worth noting that this is possibly because his political relationship with al-Turabi has declined enormously since 1964, at which point both thinkers had come recently to be related by marriage. This said, news of the shooting spread through Khartoum with such rapidity that al-Sadiq al-Mahdi's claim that he went on his own initiative is believable. One senior Umma Party figure would recall that after al-Sadiq's visit to the hospital on the early morning of 22 October, he sent memos to senior party members calling them to a meeting at the Imam al-Hadi's house at 6 in the morning, when the Umma policy towards the unfolding political scenario was outlined.<sup>106</sup>

Both al-Sadiq al-Mahdi and al-Hadi al-Mahdi – the then Imam of the *Ansar* – participated in al-Qurayshi's funeral procession. Their presence helped to persuade al-Qurayshi's *Ansari* family, who had previously been wavering over sanctioning political exploitation of their son's death, to permit the funeral procession.<sup>107</sup> Al-Sadiq played a particularly significant symbolic role during the events at the Midan Abd al-Muni'im when he led the prayers over al-Qurayshi's corpse, an honour he appears



to have been encouraged to take by al-Turabi – which would again indicate the desire of the latter to strengthen the role of the 'traditional' forces in the Revolution.<sup>108</sup> The Imam al-Hadi then wrote a memorandum demanding that the military 'return to the barracks'. This memorandum actually preceded the lawyers' and judges' memorandum demanding an investigation into al-Qurayshi's shooting, which was not sent to the palace till 24 October – although it cannot be said to have had the same impact in terms of promoting civil disobedience.<sup>109</sup>

Given that so many senior figures in the regime hailed from Khatmiyya backgrounds and Abboud had the support of the PDP, it is perhaps unsurprising that among the 'traditional' political forces, the Umma was more visible than the two parties that had historic links to the Khatmiyya. This is not to say that these two parties did not participate at all. Representatives of the PDP, NUP and Khatmiyya order turned up to attend the funeral demonstration, including Isma'il al-Azhari, Muhammad 'Uthman al-Mirghani, and Mirghani Hamza, and Shamouq recalls that Mirghani Hamza was the first to send a telegram of complaint to Abboud.<sup>110</sup> Mallasi claims that it was an NUP politician, Bashir al-Tayyib, who helped mobilize the crowds against the regime at the Midan Abd al-Muni'im by climbing atop the lorry bearing al-Qurayshi's corpse and declaring 'go to hell Abboud, go to hell you soldiers'.<sup>111</sup>

Nevertheless, the prominence of the Umma – which would represent the most powerful force in Sudanese politics in the years following the Revolution – in contrast to a divided unionist movement, was signified by the choice of the Mahdi's *gubba* (tomb) as a meeting place for the political parties, including the SCP, PDP and NUP. It was also a youthful Sadiq al-Mahdi who, after the meeting with the professional bodies at the *gubba* on 27 October, seized a pen and paper and started drafting a national charter in preparation for meeting Abboud.<sup>112</sup> The PDP, having been the only political party close to the regime in the period before October 1964, made a less significant contribution to the Revolution than the other parties, and neither the patron of the Khatmiyya order, Sayyid Ali al-Mirghani, nor his son Muhammad Uthman al-Mirghani attended the meeting that led to the formation of the UNE.<sup>113</sup> Nevertheless, the fact that one PDP representative did attend the meeting at the *gubba*, following Sayyid Ali al-Mirghani's statement on 23 October condemning al-Qurayshi's killing and calling for a return to democracy,<sup>114</sup> also appears to have been a crucial factor in persuading Abboud to give in to the demonstrations – the president was shocked that the only political force that had consistently supported him throughout his term had now abandoned him.<sup>115</sup>

Another reason that the agency of the Umma, DUP and NUP should not be understated is that there was no absolute divide between the 'traditional parties' and the 'modern forces' as represented by the professional movement. Given the mass electoral bases that these parties enjoyed in the rural areas of Sudan, politically mobile professionals often found that these parties were a useful vehicle to further their own ideological agendas and careers. Mubarak Zarroug and Muhammad Ahmad Mahgub, who were both prominent in the Bar Association during the October Revolution, were members of the NUP and Umma Party, respectively. Umma Party members who participated in the Professional Front included Sharif al-Tuhami, Uthman Jadallah and Sara al-Fadil, the latter of whom attended the famous judges' demonstration.<sup>116</sup> In the aftermath of the Revolution, professionals affiliated with the nascent Ba'athist

and Arab nationalist organizations joined either the PDP or the NUP so as to further their political cause. The Ba'athist Shawgi Mallasi agreed to join the political office of the PDP alongside a number of Nasserist lawyers after reading the party's manifesto and realizing that it was 'in effect, a summary of the thoughts of the immortal leader Abd al-Nasir and the Ba'ath Party', while his comrades Sa'id Hammour and Badr al-Din Mudathir joined the NUP.<sup>117</sup> It should be acknowledged in this context that the Khatmiyya sponsors of the NUP and then, later, the PDP were 'relatively urbanized and secularized'<sup>118</sup> in contrast to their *Ansar* counterparts.

Thus it would be misleading to claim that the Umma, NUP and PDP were too 'traditional' to have contributed significantly to a 'modern' revolution. Admittedly, the fact that the Revolution was a spontaneous urban event made it difficult for these parties to mobilize their rural partisans as effectively as the Muslim Brotherhood and communists could their urban adherents within the 'modern forces'. When Umma politicians attended al-Qurayshi's funeral procession on 22 October, they were surrounded by tens of *Ansar*,<sup>119</sup> and Thompson estimates that al-Sadiq al-Mahdi had been able to mobilize 1,000 of the *Ansar* youth (*shabab al-Ansar*) in Omdurman by 25 October.<sup>120</sup> However, these were still limited numbers compared with the many thousands that the Umma were able to mobilize during other less spontaneous political events in the 1950s and 1960s. Throughout late October 1964, Sadiq al-Mahdi was keen to advocate a 'long battle' against the regime that would slowly incorporate the protesters in the regions, where the Umma was far more heavily represented. This in itself was indicative of the extent to which the 'traditional' parties had failed to anticipate what would transpire.<sup>121</sup> They were overtaken by events. As seen in Chapter 1, the NUP politician Muhammad Jabara Awad attempted to acquire rural support for the Revolution by bringing armed Beja in by train from the spiritual home of the Khatmiyya order, Kassala, but they arrived too late to influence events significantly. This is why the Umma Party in particular was more influential during the transitional period and early years of the subsequent parliamentary regime, when there was more time available to it to bring in its supporters from the countryside. However, it must be acknowledged that since there was no rigid divide between the 'traditional parties' and the 'modern forces', Umma, NUP and PDP politicians wielded significant clout in Khartoum throughout the Revolution.

It would, therefore, be misleading to downplay the contribution of any of the major parties to the October Revolution. Since Abboud's regime was, almost by definition, opposed to the political parties, each of them had an interest in overthrowing it. While Nimeiri's regime was more proficient than Abboud's at playing the various parties off against each other, by the time of his downfall he too had managed to bring about the opposition of a great number of the political parties.

## The parties' uncoordinated opposition to the May Regime

Representatives of the political parties have tended to argue that the 1985 *Intifada* was the product of a series of 'cumulative struggles' against the May Regime. However, while it is true that the parties had been endeavouring to overthrow the regime since its

very inception, they rarely did so as part of a united front, and many of them suffered from serious internal factionalism throughout their period in the non-democratic wilderness. The first serious confrontation with the regime was conducted by al-Hadi al-Mahdi's wing of the Umma in 1970, without serious support from the other banned parties or even Sadiq al-Mahdi's branch of the same party, which had run against al-Hadi's in the 1968 elections. The SCP stood alone in backing Hashim al-Atta's 1971 coup attempt.

After these events, a somewhat more cohesive opposition coalition, the National Front, was constituted by the 'religious' parties – Hussein al-Hindi's DUP, al-Sadiq al-Mahdi's Umma and al-Turabi's ICF. It was this umbrella group that helped to provoke the Sha'aban uprising of 1973 and supported the two failed military takeover attempts of 1975 and 1976. While the National Front did incorporate major factions of the two northern political parties wielding mass support, the section of the Umma that participated was dominated by the personality of al-Sadiq al-Mahdi. Even within this front there was considerable tension between al-Turabi and al-Mahdi.<sup>122</sup> Meanwhile, al-Hindi – who was himself identified with the Hindiyya *sufi* Tariqa – did not receive the backing of the Khatmiyya patron Muhammad Uthman al-Mirghani, who remained close to the regime throughout the Nimeiri period.<sup>123</sup> The emergence of the Free Officers effectively divided the DUP, since like the party, the army movement identified with Nasser's Egypt, and a number of the military radicals came from pro-Khatmiyya, pro-DUP families. For instance, Mamoun Awad Abu Zeid, one of the officers who instigated the coup, was the son of the senior DUP politician Awad Abu Zeid.<sup>124</sup>

The National Front disintegrated in 1977 after Nimeiri succeeded in coaxing al-Turabi and al-Mahdi into his embrace. Although al-Mahdi would soon break with the president again, the 1977 reconciliation left al-Hindi struggling to find partners. In July 1979, he formed the 'Alliance of the Sudanese People' (*tajammu' al-sha'ab al-sudani*), along with the Sudanese branch of the Arab Ba'ath Party, various southern political groupings and a branch of the Umma constituted by al-Hadi al-Mahdi's son Wali al-Din.<sup>125</sup> However, the SCP did not join and criticized al-Hindi for failing to form a broader front. This was, nevertheless, the only effective party-based opposition grouping in the period leading up to the 1985 *Intifada*, which was able to publish its own newspaper, *al-Destour*.

Nimeiri's ideologically non-prejudicial crackdowns of 1983 and 1984 raised hopes among party activists that the common experience of imprisonment would encourage the opposition to form a broader coalition, and attempts to do so were made by representatives of all political groupings, including the independents as represented by Amin Makki Madani.<sup>126</sup> However, these efforts were consistently thwarted by the divisions within the two main parties, the DUP and Umma.<sup>127</sup> The 'Alliance of the Sudanese People' itself was weakened by al-Hindi's death in 1982 and was sidelined to an extent during the *Intifada* itself. One Ba'athist politician now claims that in later 1984 or 1985, there was an attempt by Umar Abd al-Ati and Amin Makki Madani to form an alternative, an implicitly more conservative party coalition, by contacting Sayyid Ahmad Hussein of the DUP and Muhammad Ibrahim Khalil of the Umma.<sup>128</sup> Though no such alternative to the 'Alliance of the Sudanese People' emerged, these actions may have informed the later tactics of the National Alliance. When the professional



unions initially formed the National Alliance with the political parties via Amin Makki Madani in early April 1985, they contacted the SCP, Sadiq al-Mahdi's branch of the Umma, and Ibrahim Hamad and Sayyid Ahmad Hussein of the DUP. None of them had been involved in the 'Alliance of the Sudanese People'.<sup>129</sup>

Thus it can be seen that while a number of political parties were in active opposition to Nimeiri's regime in the lead-up to the April *Intifada*, they did not pursue a particularly well coordinated or coherent political strategy. Parties, or at least factions within parties, still tended to act in accordance with their own agendas – none more so than the al-Sadiq al-Mahdi wing of the Umma Party.

### The forgotten resurgence of the 'sectarians' in 1985

It is often claimed that the 'traditional parties' had 'no role' in the April *Intifada*.<sup>130</sup> As is the case with 1964, this to some extent reflects the anti-'sectarian' prejudice of a number of those among the 'modern forces' who have written about the uprising and influenced Western commentators, as well as their resentment of these parties' domination of the political arena in the subsequent period of parliamentary democracy. However, the fact that the Workers' Trade Unions Alliance, the major labour opposition grouping, was dominated by the Umma and the DUP throughout the Nimeiri period, indicates that these parties were at the time not yet as antiquated as the 'progressives' might suggest.<sup>131</sup>

As was the case in 1964, the 'Unionists' were somewhat less active than the Umma in their opposition to the regime, largely because of divisions caused by the identification of senior Khatmiyya with the military regime. After Hussein al-Hindi's death in 1982 weakened the DUP oppositionists, the fight was largely kept alive by the then relatively junior Ali Mahmoud Hassanain, who coordinated with fellow DUP men who held leading positions in the workers' opposition, such as Hasan al-Tayyib and Hasan Mustafa.<sup>132</sup> However, the relative isolation of Hassanain's group is evidenced by the fact that after the *Intifada*, it was forced to form a splinter faction, naming itself after the old NUP, in protest against the DUP leadership's refusal to expel individuals such as Ahmad al-Sayyid Hamid who had participated in Nimeiri's regime.<sup>133</sup> Nevertheless, before 1985 there was a secret DUP youth organization, which participated in elections in the various student unions. Members of this organization have emphasized their contribution to the crucial demonstration at Omdurman Islamic University on 26 March,<sup>134</sup> but while they represented a part of the coalition that dominated the student union at the time, its president was an Umma man, Muhammad Ahmad Salame. Nevertheless, it seems that the youth of the party were more committed to the anti-regime movement than the party mainstream, hinting at the generational tensions within Sudanese society at large.

The role of the Umma Party during the 1985 *Intifada* was probably more prominent than it was in 1964, for a number of reasons. First, the fact that the uprising was widely anticipated gave the party the opportunity to articulate a semi-coherent political strategy. Secondly, as will be seen in the next chapter, the ICF had effectively relinquished its hegemony over the student unions after the discontent



that the party's alliance with Nimeiri had provoked among the educated youth, and al-Sadiq's followers were to some extent able to fill the gap it had left among the more socially conservative students. Thirdly, the Umma Party had more support in western Sudan than any other party, and western Sudan was particularly visible on the national political stage at the time because of the complicated political situation brought about by the Darfur famine. Fourthly, there were a far greater number of Umma supporters from rural Sudan in the capital than was the case in 1964, both because of the recent famine migration and because of the general rural-urban drift in the past two decades.

As seen above, the reason that the Umma Party's participation in the 1964 Revolution was comparatively minor was the limited presence of the *Ansar* in Khartoum. By 1985, the situation was somewhat different. The most noticeable aspect of Umma's contribution to the *Intifada* was the role played by the *Ansar* student movement in Omdurman Islamic University, the institution that provided the spark for the *Intifada* on 26 April. The president of its student union at the time was an Umma man, Muhammad Ahmad Salame, who led a coalition that also included the DUP and 'independents'.<sup>135</sup> The *Ansar* had a heavy presence in Omdurman Islamic University, partially because of the socially conservative traditions of the university itself, where more secular political organizations such as the Ba'athists and SCP could make relatively little impact.<sup>136</sup> Abd al-Rasul Nur, who participated in the National Front in the 1970s as an Umma student in Khartoum University, admitted after the *Intifada* that the Umma Party had taken longer than the other parties to make its presence felt in Khartoum student politics, a fact he blamed on the British colonial tactic of isolating the western region of Sudan from the urban riverain centre. However, he claimed that the *Ansar* student movement had begun to take shape in 1965 and contributed significantly to the Libyan-sponsored takeover attempt of 1976 as well as the 1985 *Intifada*.<sup>137</sup>

The extent to which the Umma leadership coordinated the student demonstrations at Omdurman Islamic University on 26 March 1985 is debatable. Al-Mahdi's intelligence chief Abd al-Rahman Farah asserted after the *Intifada* that the 26 March demonstration was planned in the house of a senior member of the party, Umar Nur al-Da'im,<sup>138</sup> although *Ansar* student leaders contend that they provided the initiative.<sup>139</sup> University lecturers state that it was a direct communication between senior Umma official Bakri Aadil and the students of Omdurman Islamic University that led to the famous demonstration, and that Umar Nur al-Da'im himself attended it in person.<sup>140</sup> Farah also claims that the party leadership met at around this time and discussed the possibility of having armed party members engaged in battle with the regime. However, he also maintains that al-Sadiq al-Mahdi decreed at this meeting that the Umma Party should not try and lead the struggle alone, and should, instead, endeavour to encourage the army, which was a more national institution, to do so.<sup>141</sup> Al-Mahdi himself asserts that he contacted Tawfiq al-Khalil in the army leadership before 5 April to persuade him to support the *Intifada*.<sup>142</sup>

If this is true, it would explain why al-Sadiq al-Mahdi did not speak openly in support of the *Intifada* until 5 April, 10 days after its outbreak. Although we are reliant on Farah's account, it is logical enough that the party would have pursued such

a strategy. As observed previously, the *Ansar* had not fared well in clashes with Nimeiri's security forces. Moreover, al-Sadiq al-Mahdi feared either assassination or judicial murder. Following the *Intifada*, he would claim that Nimeiri had tried to assassinate him twice in 1975 and 1980, and had been planning in 1985 to have him tried and executed in a manner similar to Mahmud Muhammad Taha on the basis that he too had spoken out against the September Laws.<sup>143</sup> In fact, he has recently acknowledged that the reason that he did not engage in any open verbal confrontation with the regime after his release from prison in December 1984 was that he knew Nimeiri had released him from prison deliberately, just as he had Mahmud Muhammad Taha, so that he might make the kind of public declaration that would serve as the justification for an apostasy trial.<sup>144</sup> It was presumably for these reasons that, when he was contacted by the leaders of the National Alliance through Amin Makki Madani on 2 April, the day before the famous mass demonstration on 3 April, he told them that he would not attend for 'security reasons'. However, he did send a draft charter, promising that the *Ansar* would attend the protests, and arrange that Umar Nur al-Da'im and Salah Abd al-Salam would act as liaisons between the Umma Party and the National Alliance in the coming days.<sup>145</sup>

Al-Sadiq al-Mahdi waited until 5 April, when it was already clear that the regime had little support left, to declare his opposition to it publicly – although the fact that 5 April was a Friday was important, since it gave him the opportunity to broadcast his condemnation of Nimeiri to the largest possible audience during the weekly *khutba* sermon at his mosque in Omdurman. Nevertheless, even after this declaration, he went into hiding immediately, moving from secret location to secret location in Khartoum and delegating a committee formed from the Umma leadership to respond to events as they unfolded.<sup>146</sup> The other likely factor in the decision to hold back Umma participation would have been al-Sadiq's knowledge that the party was, given its large support base in rural Sudan, far more likely to win out in a democratic rather than a military confrontation – as it ultimately did in the 1986 elections. It seems that he thus waited for the various forces that had toppled the previous military regime in 1964 – the unions, pro-democracy groups in the army and the urban public at large – to achieve the same feat and then brought the Umma and its supporters in to play just as the regime was about to expire.

When al-Mahdi did declare war on the government on 5 April, it demonstrated his capacity to mobilize the support of the western Sudanese in Omdurman who had been marginalized by Nimeiri's unsympathetic stance on the Darfur famine. The Umma Party student organization had already been working to garner sympathy among the Darfuris in Omdurman displaced by famine, offering assistance in refugee camps at Abu Zeid and Mawalih.<sup>147</sup> 'The students were greatly influenced by the refugees from Kordofan and Darfur', recalls the *Ansar* student leader Isma'il Adam Ali, who hails from Kordofan himself. Ali notes the frustration that students at Omdurman Islamic University felt when instead of promising support for the starvation-hit regions, Nimeiri's speech of 25 March downplayed the extent of the famine.<sup>148</sup> The president's arrogant declaration was, for him, the main cause of the 26 March demonstration.

Al-Sadiq al-Mahdi's criticisms of the September Laws would have gained him particular support among the displaced western Sudanese groups in Omdurman, a

number of which had resorted to theft as a survival strategy, since the regime had applied its 'Islamic' punishments with particular vigour against them.<sup>149</sup> Al-Mahdi had railed against the new legislation from the moment of its promulgation, arguing in front of hundreds of thousands of *Ansari* followers in 1983 that Islamic punishments could be applied only in the context of a just social and economic order.<sup>150</sup> His two sermons at the Wad Nubawi mosque on 5 April condemned the regime for having applied nothing Islamic since its declaration of *shari'ah* in 1983 other than 'flogging and amputations and crucifixion'.<sup>151</sup> Even university-educated western Sudanese tend to remember this as a time during which there was a great deal of admiration for al-Mahdi, which would later vanish as a result of his policies in the third democratic period.<sup>152</sup> Following the sermon, there was a large demonstration in the Sharia al-Hijra in Omdurman.<sup>153</sup>

Given its central involvement in the events at Omdurman Islamic University, the Umma Party can probably be labelled as one of the 'initiators' of the *Intifada*. This said, the somewhat furtive behaviour of the party following the outbreak of the initial protests and its decision to wait for the army and professional movement to take action illustrated the limits of what Sadiq al-Mahdi's 'civil jihad' could achieve. Nevertheless, the sheer visibility of the Umma's contribution to the April *Intifada* belies the assumption that the 'traditional' forces failed to contribute to the civil protests. This was in marked distinction to the comparatively limited participation of the two principal 'modern forces', the ICF and SCP, in the anti-regime mobilization.

### The *Intifada* and the waning influence of Sudanese communism

Western and regional analysts of the April *Intifada* were quick to observe the apparently negligible role played by the SCP leadership, and the fact that the party did not even appear to have a particularly significant role in organizing the demonstrations on the street.<sup>154</sup> Unsurprisingly, this fact was seized upon by right-wing critics of the party. Islamists who participated in the *Intifada* have been keen to downplay the role of the communists, arguing that they thought that the 'time was not right'.<sup>155</sup> However, less unsympathetic sources also tend to acknowledge this, arguing that the blows inflicted upon the movement by Nimeiri since 1971 had weakened its organization to the extent that it could never hope to achieve the same level of influence as it had possessed after the October Revolution. Adlan Hardallo, the head of the Khartoum University Teacher's Union during the *Intifada*, recalls that in 1985:

they were shattered, they were suffering ... they thought that the time has not come ... we had a gathering of the union ... in that time I called for toppling the regime ... the next morning my friends who were communists were so angry, why did you do that, and before that ... they said let us organize ourselves better, but they never thought the regime would go as quickly as that.<sup>156</sup>

The weak response of the SCP to the protests appears to have been acknowledged by the party itself. A fortnight after the *Intifada*, it issued a document blaming its inability



to contribute significantly to the civilian protests on the State Security Organization's domination of the workers' organizations.<sup>157</sup> SCP members – influenced to some extent by introspection brought on by Umar al-Bashir's successful pro-Islamist coup in 1989 – would later admit that at the time of the *Intifada*, 'the party was weakly established among the working classes, the students, the farmers, the unions and among the working classes in general, as a result of the traces of the July 1971 blow'.<sup>158</sup> The only union they controlled was the electricity workers' union, and this did little to coordinate with the Union Alliance.<sup>159</sup> Meanwhile, as seen above, their allies in the Bar Association had all abandoned them to side with Nimeiri in 1970. The party also asserted that it had been severely weakened by a series of campaigns launched against it by the supposed alliance of the ICF, SSO and CIA between 1978 and 1980.<sup>160</sup> It had also withdrawn from the newly formed Free Officer Organization within the military in 1977 for fear of a repeat of the crisis of 1971.<sup>161</sup> The party was further crippled by defections induced by the changing intellectual and political climate. In the early 1980s, a number of leftist intellectuals left the SCP to join the ICF.<sup>162</sup>

This is not to say that the SCP did not support the *Intifada*. On 30 March, its Central Committee issued a statement praising the actions of the students who had led the demonstrations of 26 and 27 March and calling for an end to the May Regime. The pamphlet responded to attempts by the regime to blame the rioting on the ICF by observing that the slogans adopted by the demonstrators were the same slogans that were being chanted at the time when the ICF was in the government. These included 'down, down USA' and 'lan yahkumna al-Bank al-Dawli'.<sup>163</sup> The fact that these slogans expressed a considerable degree of economic discontent does not demonstrate that the civil protests were directly inspired by the SCP. As seen above, Muhammad Ibrahim Nugd, the leader of the SCP at the time, admits that the SCP 'did not make' April. He argues 'you can go back to the Union Alliance and Khartoum lecturers and lawyers and judges and others to know how the *Intifada* was prepared and who participated in it'.<sup>164</sup> One might conclude, therefore, that while socialist ideals had a strong residual influence among the educated elite and urban public in general, the SCP itself had been too severely undermined by its scourging at the hands of Nimeiri's security forces to marshal this rebellious sentiment in any positive direction.

## The apogee of Sudanese Ba'athism

While the Sudanese Ba'athists, alongside other adherents of the Arab nationalist cause, have tended to occupy third rank behind the communist and Islamic movements among the political parties vying for supremacy over Sudan's educated classes, their role in the 1985 *Intifada* was possibly more significant than either of these. They had not been tainted by association with Nimeiri's regime, like the ICF; nor had they been brought low by conflict with it as had the SCP. It is easy to overlook the role of the Ba'athists at this time, since they had reached the apex of their influence by 1985 but receded from the Sudanese political arena following their failed military coup of 1990, which brought about the annihilation of their military wing.



The Sudanese Ba'ath Party was only a very small organization at the beginning of the May Regime, but its credibility among the opposition rose as the other branch of the Arab nationalist movement, the Nasserists, became associated with the regime through a number of Free Officers and figures such as Babikir Awadallah.<sup>165</sup> Nimeiri himself had helped it to expand by sending study missions to Iraq and Syria.<sup>166</sup> The outbreak of the Iran-Iraq war in 1980 was particularly significant because Sudan's support for Ba'athist Iraq led to increased contact between the two countries, particularly in the military context, which allowed the Ba'athist cell in the army to flourish.<sup>167</sup> At the same time that this conflict enabled the Sudanese Ba'ath to thrive off Nimeiri's alliance with Saddam, it provided the context for the party's demonization of the dictator's alliance with the ICF, since they interpreted al-Turabi as Sudan's very own Khumayni.<sup>168</sup> In this sense, the Sudanese Ba'ath was drawing succour from the regime, and simultaneously becoming its intimate enemy.

Resentment of Nimeiri's relationship with the ICF may have been one of the reasons that the party's resistance to his declaration of a state of emergency in 1984 was so pronounced. Al-Hussein claims that in April 1984 the leaders of the Ba'ath Party decided to declare a state of 'total mobilization' within the party, which would last until the success of the *Intifada* a year later.<sup>169</sup> It seems that this 'mobilization' did pose a serious challenge to the regime. SSO agents Abu Rannat and Abd al-Aziz recall that in this period, the Ba'ath Party daubed walls and spread copies of their underground newspaper, *al-Hadaf*, with greater efficiency than the SCP – a fact they attribute to the financial resources provided to the movement by Saddam.<sup>170</sup> The Ba'athist cells in Sudan were able to escape the attentions of the SSO with a relative degree of success, having been well trained in counter-surveillance by their political supervisors in Iraq.<sup>171</sup>

The Ba'ath Party's relative financial and political prosperity at this time, in addition to its alliance with the DUP, enabled it to plant roots in the professional and labour movement. Ba'athists who were active in the Doctors' Union included Sayyid Muhammad Abdullah, Khalid Sha'a al-Din and Dr Da'ud al-Din. These men helped to issue pamphlets in the name of the 'Alliance of the Sudanese People' branch of the 'Doctors' Alliance' during the famous strike of 1984, explaining its objectives.<sup>172</sup> The Alliance of the Sudanese People also offered the Ba'athists the chance to develop their cadres in the labour movement alongside the DUP, with whom it established the Trade Union Alliance.<sup>173</sup> The four Ba'athists who were famously tried by the regime for membership of the party between October 1984 and February 1985 (see below) included a builder, a student, a technician in the ministry of construction and a pharmacist.<sup>174</sup>

It was Nimeiri's decision to try these four Ba'athists that gave the party particular public prominence. The self-styled *Imam* of Sudan intended that the court, which was headed by the ICF-affiliated judge al-Mukashifi al-Kabbashi, should demonstrate that Ba'athist principles were un-Islamic. Unfortunately for Nimeiri, the Ba'athists received a great deal of support from the professional movement and the trial gave the party the opportunity to mobilize support from among the unions in which they had the strongest presence.<sup>175</sup> A number of prominent Ba'athists were members of the Bar Association, including their leader, Taysir Mudathir, and others such as Kamal Jizouli,

Sadiq Shami, Sa'ïd Hammour, Ishaq Shaddad and Abu Jibba.<sup>176</sup> Since his declaration of the September Laws, the president had been determined to use trials to garner popular support for the regime, and this particular event was no exception, being attended by 1,000 members of the public. Al-Kabbashi himself upped the stakes by announcing new charges against the accused on 31 January, claiming that the Ba'athists had defamed Islam by writing in their pamphlets 'Islam is appropriate as religion and not as state', and that Ba'athism was anti-Islamic on the grounds that it was a racist ideology. The defendants were consequently charged with apostasy from Islam, which if proved would merit the death penalty.<sup>177</sup> Thus the trial became an intellectual battleground in which the legitimacy of the regime and the version of political Islam it had begun to espouse were challenged.

This confrontation between Arabism and Islamism provides an obvious historical example to challenge the glib but all too frequently made generalization that successive ruling elites in Sudan have pursued an 'Arab-Islamic' agenda. More importantly, it gave the Sudanese Ba'athists an opportunity to launch a critique of the regime's interpretation of Islam within the court and internationalize opposition to Nimeiri.<sup>178</sup> The Ba'athists and their allies in the Bar Association brought experts on Arab nationalist thought from Jordan, Egypt and Algeria to Khartoum to defend Ba'athist ideology against the charges that had been brought against it.<sup>179</sup> Eventually the court was forced to withdraw the extra charges and limit itself to prosecuting the Ba'athists for membership of a banned political organization, which resulted in two of the accused being sentenced to terms of imprisonment and the others being heavily fined.<sup>180</sup> According to al-Hussein, this was because both Nimeiri and the SSO were so afraid that the court was turning into a propaganda opportunity for the Ba'ath Party that the dictator ordered al-Kabbashi to remove the extra charges.<sup>181</sup> Following the *Intifada*, the Bar Association would celebrate exposing Nimeiri's ignorance of the relationship between Arab nationalism and Islam.<sup>182</sup> The Ba'ath Party thus played a significant role in exposing the frailties of the Nimeiri system, and demonstrated that Arab nationalism could still offer a potent ideological challenge to the regime, particularly in the regional context. Furthermore, these events illustrated just how effective collaboration between parties and professional unions could be.

Arguably, the Ba'athists' declaration of war against the regime was timed too early. When the April uprising broke out, a great number of its cadres had already been imprisoned by the regime, including its leading student activists at the University of Cairo.<sup>183</sup> They were in this regard less favourably positioned than the Umma, which had been out of the spotlight since the release of its leaders in 1984. Al-Hussein admits that the Ba'athist movement had little presence in Omdurman Islamic University, where the street demonstrations first began.<sup>184</sup> However, the Ba'athists do claim that their organization in the Doctors' Union helped to instigate the doctors' strike, pointing to the fact that one of the two men who proposed and helped to arrange the decisive meeting of 27 April was Sayyid Muhammad Abdullah.<sup>185</sup> The Ba'athists participated during the uprising itself by continuing their campaign of anti-regime pamphleteering and wall daubs, and mobilizing their cadres within the student movement in the University of Cairo Khartoum Branch, and University of Khartoum and Technical Institute to participate in the demonstrations against the regime.<sup>186</sup>

In some respects, the successful participation of the Ba'athists in the April *Intifada* represented the twilight of the era in which Arab nationalism was mobilized as a revolutionary ideology. Since Nasserism was discredited by the defeat of Egypt in the 1967 war with Israel, Ba'athism and Arab nationalism had come to be more closely associated with corrupt and autocratic regimes in countries such as Syria and Iraq. It was somewhat ironic that the Sudanese Ba'ath Party, which was funded and supported by these regimes, should be at the forefront of civil protests against a non-democratic regime in Sudan. The main reason it was able to capture this particular role was that, while in countries like Egypt and Syria, Islamism had emerged as the dominant anti-government ideology, in Sudan the most powerful Islamist faction – Hasan al-Turabi's ICF – had opted to side with the regime. This pattern of events contrasted strongly with developments elsewhere in the Middle East. Observing the intricate nexus of political relationships between the government and the secular and 'Islamic' parties thus helps us to understand just why the April *Intifada* was such a unique event at the time.

### ICF isolation and the ambiguous role of political Islam in 1985

Any analysis of the role of the Islamic Movement in the 1985 *Intifada* faces the problem of opinions on the matter being severely polarized. This is because the Sudanese political environment in the immediate wake of the *Intifada* was defined by the conflict between the Islamic Movement's new political manifestation, the National Islamic Front (NIF), and an alliance of the other major opposition parties. While most of the parties involved have tended to overemphasize their own part in the protests, the debates over the contribution of the ICF are particularly acrimonious. The historian is frequently confronted with narratives that either heavily exaggerate the role of the ICF during the *Intifada* or deny it completely.

What we can establish is that the May Regime, in spite of implementing *shari'a* in line with the political objectives of the Islamic Movement, broke with it decisively on 9 March 1985. On this day, 3 weeks before the *Intifada*, Nimeiri dispatched SSO agents to detain the entire ICF leadership. As seen in the previous chapter, it was believed by some that this move had been encouraged by George Bush senior on a recent visit to Sudan, and was also a result of Nimeiri's fears that the Islamic Movement was seeking to oust him.<sup>187</sup> The Islamists themselves tend to attribute the decision to Bush, although this is perhaps convenient since it enabled the party to represent itself as a victim of American imperialism.<sup>188</sup>

While Islamist sources are invariably quick to claim that Nimeiri's break with the ICF was the decisive act that led to the *Intifada*,<sup>189</sup> the movement's opponents tend to stress that the fact that the president had arrested all its major leaders made it impossible for it to participate in the civilian protest movement in any significant way.<sup>190</sup> However, Muslim Brother accounts observe that not all of those wanted by Nimeiri and the SSO were actually caught; apparently, Ali Uthman Taha, Ibrahim



Sanussi, Ali al-Haj, Mahdi Ibrahim, Uthman Abd al-Wahhab, Su'ad al-Fatih and Amin Banani, all evaded capture.<sup>191</sup> Both Taha and el-Affendi claim that news of the imminent arrests was leaked to the ICF.<sup>192</sup> This makes sense, since the ICF had penetrated the SSO with a degree of effectiveness in the years leading up to 1985.<sup>193</sup> Former SSO agents Abu Rannat and Abd al-Aziz admit that at the time the detention orders were issued, the SSO did not possess up-to-date lists of the active members of the ICF, and acknowledge that as a result, a number of important members of the organization evaded capture.<sup>194</sup>

Amin Banani claims that after the ICF split with Nimeiri, 'All our political weight was on the side of the opposition, without any previous arrangement'.<sup>195</sup> Kamal Umar insists that it was precisely because 8 years of collaboration with the May Regime had enabled the Islamists to understand the inner workings of its security apparatus that those who evaded arrest were able to continue acting under the radar and mobilize the population against the government.<sup>196</sup> Mahbub Abd Salam maintains that the demonstration at Omdurman Islamic University was heavily attended by students from the Islamic Way and brought Islamists 'from every part of Khartoum' onto the street, but fails to account for the fact that the union executive committee that led the demonstration was in the hands of an anti-ICF coalition.<sup>197</sup>

Even if we acknowledge their presence on the streets, it is difficult to believe that the ICF acted in perfect unison with the opposition, given that opposition pamphlets were busy attacking the September Laws, which had been endorsed by the ICF, as a distortion of *shari'a*. The ICF had been effectively isolated from all the other major opposition parties since its reconciliation with Nimeiri in 1977. In the initial student demonstrations of 26 and 27 March, in which the ICF appear not to have participated, there were shouts of 'no to the peddlars of religion', and Faisal Islamic Bank, which was well known for its association with the Islamic Movement, was vandalized.<sup>198</sup> Even senior ICF sources acknowledged that the party's relationship with the rest of the opposition movement at the time of the *Intifada* was strained. Ali Uthman Taha claimed 2 years after the *Intifada* that a member of the Engineers' Union had invited the party to participate in the anti-regime movement, but that the ICF had responded that they would participate only if the SCP did not.<sup>199</sup> Another reason the ICF was not in a position to forge a relationship with the National Alliance was that it had a very weak relationship with the unions at the time, as a result of the fact that it had refused to support their demands for higher pay during the series of strikes that had preceded the uprising.<sup>200</sup>

Thus, the role of the ICF in coordinating opposition to the regime was probably relatively insignificant. This has now, in effect, been acknowledged by a number of senior Islamists. Yasin Umar Imam argues that the reason the ICF was somewhat withdrawn from the public demonstrations was because senior figures within the movement could not decide whether to support a civil movement against the regime or launch a military takeover using the ICF's cadres in the army.<sup>201</sup> Al-Turabi himself states that the majority of the cadres who had not been imprisoned lay low for fear that Umar al-Tayyib was planning to take extreme measures against the Islamists he did imprison.<sup>202</sup> Recalling the Islamic Movement's role in the *Intifada*, he observes that Nimeiri 'lost his support after he arrested us'.<sup>203</sup> In other words, what mattered most



was not the Islamic Movement's active contribution to the *Intifada*, but the fact that it did not defend the May Regime as it had been doing previously.

Nevertheless, the fact that the ICF had a limited participation in the civil protests of 1985 should not lead us to exclude political Islam in general as a source of motivation for oppositionists. As seen in Chapter 2, a number of the political parties that challenged the introduction of the September Laws were forced to adopt the language used by Islamist movements to counter the challenge posed by the Islamization of the legislation.<sup>204</sup> Moreover, many *Ikhwanis* or ex-*Ikhwanis* who had not joined al-Turabi's party when it was formed in 1964 stood with the *Intifada*. For instance, Sadiq Abdullah's branch of the Muslim Brotherhood joined the National Alliance soon after it was formed.<sup>205</sup> Salah Misbah, who garnered popular attention in 1984 when he was sentenced by an 'instantaneous justice court' for publicly denouncing the September Laws during a meeting held by Nimeiri at the Armed Forces Mosque, was a member of the Islamic Socialist Party.<sup>206</sup> Jizouli Dafa'allah, Mirghani al-Nasri and Hussein Abu Salih, who as will be seen in the next chapter were prominent professional leaders, were all involved in the Muslim Brotherhood student wing at the time of the ILM, the former two as leaders. This reminds us that the *Intifada* did not simply represent a conflict between the secular political forces and a religious state.

The Islamists who stood with the *Intifada* represented a wide spectrum of ideologies, and thus did not constitute a homogenous movement. One of the most interesting cases is that of Abdullah Zakariyya. Although this former ILM man had joined the Islamic Socialist Party when it was formed in 1964, by the time of the *Intifada* he had left this party, having embraced the principle of 'Islamic anarchism', which he attributes to the influence of his time spent as a master's student in London in the 1960s.<sup>207</sup> It was this philosophy that he purportedly used to influence the Libyan Revolution as an exile there in the 1970s as the co-author of Gaddafi's Green Book. He tried to spread this philosophy in Sudan in the period immediately before the *Intifada*, infiltrating Libyan-backed Sudanese 'Revolutionary Committees' into Khartoum to foment dissent against Nimeiri.<sup>208</sup> Zakariyya brought more agents into Khartoum during the *Intifada* itself, and he claims that a large number of those released from Kober in its immediate aftermath were accountable to him.<sup>209</sup> Thus the Islamists who stood with the *Intifada* included ultraconservatives, quasi-socialists, independents and anarchists.

Just as the SCP's emasculation at the hands of the government did not prevent socialist ideals from influencing the educated elite that drove the *Intifada*, the association of the ICF with the regime and its policies did not prevent other Islamist professionals who had been a part of the original Sudanese *Ikhwan* from participating in the anti-regime struggle. This leads us to challenge models that identify civil protest in Sudan as either exclusively 'secular' or 'religious', or those that associate it with specific political factions.

## Conclusion

A closer investigation of the events of 1964 and 1985 gives the lie to the assumption that it was the political left and, specifically, the SCP that dominated the uprisings.

The SCP did not exercise a dominant influence at the University of Khartoum, the institution that acted as the cradle of the October Revolution. Therefore, while claims made by opponents of the SCP that it actively opposed the October Revolution are difficult to justify, it cannot be said that the party instigated the civilian insurrection. It certainly threw a great deal of weight behind the uprising when it broke out, but by this stage, it represented just one party among a wide array of political and social groups pushing the Revolution along. Admittedly, it was a heavyweight force in 1964, but it was less so in 1985, when it was still struggling to recover from the repeated aggressions of Nimeiri and his security agencies. As will be demonstrated in the next two chapters, leftists in both the army and the professionals' unions who sympathized in a general way with SCP ideology did emerge as major protagonists in 1985 – but with little direct inspiration from the party itself. The one secular political party that helped to mobilize dissent in 1985 was the Ba'ath Party. Because of its direct links to Ba'athist Iraq, the party was a well-funded and well-trained organization at the time, enabling it to force Nimeiri to back down during his attempted show-trial of February 1985.

The more socially conservative parties that based their legitimacy on some form or another of political Islam – whether the more historically rooted forms of Islam espoused by the Khatmiyya order and Mahdist *Ansar*, or the newer and more radical forms established by the Muslim Brotherhood and the political parties it spawned – participated to varying degrees in the mobilization of popular dissent during both uprisings. However, in spite of the role of *Ikhwan* students in the KUSU executive in 1964, we cannot state confidently that any of these parties created the October Revolution. Nevertheless, like the SCP, each of them played an important part in supporting it when it did break out. Moreover, the critical significance of Hasan al-Turabi's activities during this period is acknowledged by many parties. Although al-Turabi was a university lecturer and not a politician during the October Revolution, it seems likely that he coordinated his activities with colleagues in the Muslim Brotherhood more than his own somewhat self-aggrandizing accounts of the past suggest. Meanwhile, it would also be unfair to uphold the claim that the 'traditional parties', the PDP, NUP and Umma, played no significant role in the revolution and simply reaped the rewards after democratic elections were held. The presence of Sadiq al-Mahdi and other *Ansar* leaders at Khartoum hospital on the night of 21/22 October helped convince al-Qurayshi's *Ansari* family to support the demonstrations, while the presence of the Khatmiyya at the *Gubba* may have motivated Abboud's decision to step down.

While in 1964 the various political forces cooperated with each other at least until the regime had been removed, in 1985 there was more evident division, since the ICF decision to support the May Regime almost until its final hour had isolated it from the other political forces. Just as the SCP was accused in 1964 of opposing the uprising in its initial stages, the ICF was attacked in 1985 for declining to support the *Intifada*. These claims are somewhat harder to refute, especially since they are now acknowledged by a number of figures within the Islamic Movement itself. However, what can be said is that, given the considerable economic and political weight of the ICF at the time, the fact that it did not defend the regime or oppose the various demonstrating parties was significant in itself. Among the 'traditional' religious parties, the Umma in particular

played a far more active role in supporting the anti-regime movement. While the DUP was more divided than the Umma at the time of the uprising, the partnership of one faction with the Sudanese Ba'ath Party in the 'Alliance of the Sudanese People' indicated that the 'modern/secular' and 'traditional/religious' forces within Sudanese politics could forge common agendas. It might even be claimed that the Umma Party helped instigate the 1985 uprising through its domination of the Omdurman Islamic University students' union. However, the fact that it did not deploy its *Ansar* supporters *en masse* during the early stages of the uprising illustrated that Sadiq al-Mahdi knew that he needed to work alongside other important groups within urban Sudanese society for the popular revolt against Nimeiri to succeed.

Senior professionals have tended to claim that the major political parties failed to react as quickly as they did to the uprisings, but such arguments overlook the symbiotic nature of the ties that bound the party and professional elites. Both uprisings demonstrated just how effective coordination between professionals and party politicians could be. The SCP's brandishing of the general strike slogan in 1961 can at the very least be said to have provided the background for the Professional Front's successful mobilization of civil disobedience 3 years later; lawmen affiliated to Arab nationalist parties were involved in the declaration of civil disobedience; Hasan al-Turabi inspired the KUSU students in his role as a university lecturer; and in 1985, the Bar Association and Ba'ath Party collaborated to thwart Nimeiri's *muhakama al-fikra*. The inter-linkage between the parties and student unions also proved vital, particularly at the University of Khartoum in 1964 and Omdurman Islamic University in 1985. However, it is worth observing that in 1985 neither of the two major parties that were perceived to exercise hegemony over the educated elite, the SCP or the ICI, contributed noticeably towards the mobilization of the dissent. The parties could manipulate professionals or student politics, but they did not control it. Thus, it is certainly worth analysing the various institutions associated with the 'modern forces' as actors in their own right.

## The ‘Modern Forces’: Students, Professionals and Labour Unions in 1964 and 1985

As seen in the previous chapter, the political parties exercised a considerable degree of influence over the various institutions associated with the ‘modern forces’ – the labour unions, professional associations and student bodies. The communists and Islamists in particular envisioned these bodies as ‘vanguard’ organizations that could shepherd the uneducated majority in Sudan towards a revolutionary ‘new order’.<sup>1</sup> Thus, these institutions have often been understood as a battleground in which communists and Islamists vied for influence.<sup>2</sup> However, this involves imposing too rigid a dichotomy between the ‘modern forces’ – associated with the communists, Islamists and the oft-ignored Arab nationalists – and the ‘traditional forces’ supposedly represented by the Umma, DUP and NUP. As seen in the previous chapter, these parties were just as capable of acting within the ‘modern forces’.

Establishing a binary division between ‘modernizers’ and ‘traditionalists’ would also risk neglecting the extent to which the protagonists within these institutions represented homogeneous elites with shared institutional interests. It will be seen here that the two uprisings occurred at times when the conflict between communism and Islamism was at its least apocalyptic, and *muthaggafeen* of all ideological hues were able to act in line with a common agenda of opposition to military rule. The fact that such well-institutionalized corporate bodies were involved in the two uprisings might set them aside from the recent Arab Spring, when the amorphous activity of internet bloggers and spontaneous street mobilization was much more prominent. However, while these bodies did attempt to provide institutional leadership to both uprisings, in studying these efforts we should not detract from the spontaneity of the events themselves. The professional activists were often as much responding to the uprisings as they were creating them.

### Khartoum University and student mobilization in 1964

Standard narratives of Sudan’s post-colonial political and intellectual history tend to represent the student environment as an arena in which communist and Islamist ideologies confronted each other. Holt and Daly observe that ‘From the 1950s the student body of [Khartoum] University tended towards polarization between the



Brotherhood and the Communists.<sup>3</sup> The informal student wings of the Muslim Brotherhood, the 'Islamic Way' (*al-ittijah al-islami*) and the 'Democratic Front' (*al-jabha al-dimuratiyya*), which represented a coalition of communists and Democrats, were at the forefront of the student movement, and in 1964 were the most heavily represented on the Khartoum University Student Union executive committee with four and three seats (out of a total of ten), respectively.<sup>4</sup>

However, it would be fallacious to presume that these student wings simply reproduced the policies of their associated parties. Farouk Eisa, a member of the original executive committee of 1964, observes that while the student political groups were linked to their parent organizations 'at the university level we did not see much influence from outside'.<sup>5</sup> Fathi Fadl, an SCP and Democratic Front member of the KUSU executive during October 1964, recalls that in this period the political parties 'didn't really practise discipline on the students, they came with lenient advice', noting that the students were held in 'very high prestige', which reflected the fact that university education was still a relatively novel phenomenon in Sudanese society at the time.<sup>6</sup> Political differences within the student body were to some extent assuaged by the common contempt that members of the educated youth had for the military. As Rabie Hasan Ahmad recalls, there was a general dissatisfaction with the government among the educated classes, or *muthagga'in*, because the military had taken most of the principal ministerial portfolios for themselves.<sup>7</sup> Thus, students of all political shades shared a mutual interest in replacing the military regime to ensure that their educations would enable them to reach positions of influence in the future.

The new generation of university students tended to be very independent and internationalist in outlook. The majority of the KUSU executive committee had already travelled to either Eastern or Western Europe a number of times.<sup>8</sup> In the buildup to the famous 21 October seminar, members of KUSU who were pushing for a confrontation with the government were closely following news of the recent student protests against regimes in Japan, Vietnam and Turkey.<sup>9</sup> In the week before the Revolution itself, the students were inspired by a particularly striking chain of international events, including Harold Wilson's election victory in the UK, the downfall of Khrushchev and China's first atomic test.<sup>10</sup> One ageing graduate commemorating October recently observed that the people of this time always followed the radio in spite of their relatively limited capacity for travel, and 'read Franz Fanon, Jean Paul Sartre, Sayyid Qutb and Salama Musa'.<sup>11</sup> Thus the students who contributed to the October protests had a shared sense of acting as intellectual pioneers that transcended their narrow party differences.

The presence of non-Sudanese lecturers at the university also lent the student protesters a certain political sophistication. One student eyewitness recalls that in the week before the fateful seminar Dr Busham Sharma, an Indian political scientist, 'gave a long and convincing talk about the need for students to engage in political activity' to the other lecturers, noting that the Khartoum students were the political leaders of the future and had to apply what they learnt in their classes.<sup>12</sup> The capacity of an Indian lecturer in politics to influence his Sudanese peers reflected the continuing prominence of the 'Third World' republican ideals of leaders such as Nehru and Nasser among the youth of the day. These ideals brought about the emergence of the 'Neutral' movement in KUSU in 1950, which by 1964 had split into three separate groups, 'Free Thought',

the 'Free Students' and the 'Socialist Democratic Congress'.<sup>13</sup> While the executive committee was headed by a representative of the Islamic Way, it had a vice-president from the Social Democratic Congress, while the larger 40-man Council was presided over by another member of this group, Hasan Abdin.<sup>14</sup>

The fact that, in 1964, Nasser's neutralist Third World republican ideals had not yet expired had ensured that neither the communists nor the Islamists reached their full radical potential.<sup>15</sup> The relationship between representatives of these two groups within the executive committee was cordial in a way that would not be possible a generation later. The Democratic Front and Islamic Way students saw each other 'as competitors, not as enemies'.<sup>16</sup> Fathi Fadl states that the political radicalization and culture of violence associated with Ali Uthman Taha's generation of Islamists from the late 1960s onwards was yet to emerge at this point, observing that he himself was a close friend of Anwar al-Hadi, the *Ikhwanī* committee member who organized the 21 October seminar.<sup>17</sup> It is worth remembering that there was considerable division within the Brotherhood at this time between the old guard and the student generation, with the former complaining that the latter had adopted 'Shiyy-Islamiyya' (Communism-Islamism) under the influence of their socialist colleagues.<sup>18</sup>

It is also noteworthy that Sudan's two ideological parties were not even the dominant political forces in all the student unions in Khartoum. The student union at the Technical Institute, which would contribute significantly to all the demonstrations and meetings that followed the 21 October seminar, was headed by Abd al-Hamid Fadl of the Umma Party. He represented the 'independents', a coalition of the Umma and NUP.<sup>19</sup> This contradicts the commonly made assumption, usually based on analysis of Khartoum University only,<sup>20</sup> that the 'traditional' political forces were comprehensively excluded from student politics.<sup>21</sup>

With all this said, it has to be acknowledged that the power struggle within KUSU between the Democratic Front and Islamic Way shaped the policies of the executive committee in the weeks leading up to October. Although the Communists' objection to the 21 October seminar has been cited by some to claim that they were unsympathetic to the October Revolution,<sup>22</sup> the truth is somewhat more subtle. After the arrest of Hafiz al-Shaikh and the members of the original KUSU executive committee following their protest to the Minister of Interior on 15 October, the council decided to elect new executive members, while keeping the same level of representation for the Islamic Way, Democratic Front and other student members that had obtained previously.<sup>23</sup>

According to Shamouq, the Democratic Front from this point onwards opposed holding another seminar. Indeed, as sources from within the Islamic Movement, including Rabie Hasan Ahmad, have been quick to point out, the Communists issued statements warning against provocation of the regime and 'deflecting the patriotic movement from its goals'.<sup>24</sup> There may well be some truth in these accounts, but assuming there is, it would be misleading to interpret this as a lack of commitment to opposing the regime. Instead, the Democratic Front consistently advocated that KUSU should contact the other student unions in Khartoum – at Omdurman Islamic University, the Technical Institute and the University of Cairo (Khartoum Branch) – before taking action.<sup>25</sup> While the executive committee agreed both to schedule another seminar and to plan a public demonstration in coordination with the other student

bodies, this decision led to a particularly acrimonious debate within the committee over which of the two actions should be prioritized. The Democratic Front emphasized that the demonstrations should be prioritized, as these would 'link the students to the masses of the street', arguing that holding another seminar might first grant the authorities an excuse to shut down the university, thus making further demonstrations impossible.<sup>26</sup>

The communist students would probably have had a much greater interest in generalizing the discontent at this time, as they had a much wider base outside the University of Khartoum than the Brotherhood did. They were far more influential among the labour unions, and also controlled the student union at the University of Cairo (Khartoum Branch).<sup>27</sup> However, the Islamic Way remained committed to holding the seminar first, and after a tied vote in the executive committee meeting, narrowly succeeded in passing the motion in a heated session of the KUSU general assembly on 20 October.<sup>28</sup> Shamouq states that on the morning of 21 October, the Democratic Front did issue a statement opposing the seminar, but this was on the basis that it represented an 'abandonment of the student struggle' and a 'provocation of the police'.<sup>29</sup> However, members of the Democratic Front deny that they opposed the seminar once it had been decided upon and observe that by the time it began in the evening of 21 October, the Democratic Front had committed itself to participation. In fact, their representative Babikir al-Haj had already begun to talk by the time the police intervened.<sup>30</sup> It seems that once the Democratic Front realized that it would be unable to direct the anti-regime struggle in the manner in which it had hoped, it decided to cut its losses and participate in the seminar. This in itself indicates that the student body was cohesive enough to pursue a single course of action in spite of the ideological differences within it.

While the Islamic Way may have seized the initiative in proposing the seminar, which caused the bloody clashes with the police, the resultant casualty list made the plurality of the students' contribution most visible. Ahmad al-Qurayshi, who after being shot in the head by a policeman became the first martyr of the Revolution, was a member of the Democratic Front, and arguably a communist. His political affiliations became a matter of controversy in the immediate aftermath of the Revolution, as a number of parties endeavoured to make political capital out of October's first martyr. Members of the Muslim Brotherhood claimed al-Qurayshi as one of their own at the time,<sup>31</sup> and some still do today,<sup>32</sup> although there is no particular evidence for this and al-Turabi has now switched to arguing that he 'had no party'.<sup>33</sup> The deceased student hailed from Garrasa in the White Nile state, and like most of its inhabitants had an *Ansari* family background. Sadiq al-Mahdi responded to this during commemorations of the Revolution in the second parliamentary period by paying visits to his grave there.<sup>34</sup> However, the Umma has never to the author's knowledge tried to maintain that al-Qurayshi himself was a party member, and his Umma-supporting family acknowledge that he was a member of the Democratic Front.<sup>35</sup> Nevertheless, al-Qurayshi's brother Abd al-Muta'al and his nephew Abd al-Rahim al-Amin who attended the University of Khartoum alongside him in 1964 and shared a room with his brother in the dormitory, insist that he was only a 'democrat' and not a communist and that he joined the Democratic Front because he wanted to fight against 'dictatorship and totalitarianism'.<sup>36</sup>



It would make sense that al-Qurayshi's conservative family would prefer to believe that he was not a communist, given the intense political competition between the SCP and *Ansar/Umma* in the White Nile region and the fact that communism was often associated with atheism in Sudan. However, a great number of communists and ex-communists have outlined a coherent and detailed story of al-Qurayshi's Marxist affiliations and role in the party. Taj al-Sirr Mekki, who attended al-Fashir secondary school with al-Qurayshi, insists that they were both part of a secret communist cell there, whereas a number of other communists have argued that al-Qurayshi was a secret liaison between the 'League of Communist Students' (*Rabita al-Tullab al-Shiyu'iyyin*) and the main party.<sup>37</sup> They maintain that, having been chosen as part of the SCP's secret organization at the university, al-Qurayshi was required not to practise open political activity, which is why his communist affiliations were not known.<sup>38</sup> If this is true, it would make sense that his family was aware that he was in the Democratic Front, but not that he was a communist. It may seem a little convenient that the Revolution's first martyr just happened to be the SCP's liaison at the university, but there is a good deal of coherence in the various communist accounts regarding al-Qurayshi.<sup>39</sup> It is also worth noting that Abdullahi Ali Ibrahim, a former student communist who crossed the ideological divide from left to right, still insists that al-Qurayshi was a communist with whom he worked in the Democratic Front.<sup>40</sup>

KUSU's response to al-Qurayshi's martyrdom further illustrated its cohesiveness as an institution. Whether or not al-Qurayshi was a communist, it seems that the student movement in its entirety came out to commemorate his death. The executive committee had sheltered the body overnight and purchased a shroud (*kafan*) and a bed (*angareeb*) upon which to bear the corpse, before students from each of the capital's universities began to gather together to join the silent funeral procession in the morning.<sup>41</sup> Significant as the funeral demonstration was, after this point the role of the unions and political parties probably eclipsed that of the students. Certainly the students helped to generalize the political strike, after KUSU decreed on 24 October that students should travel back to their families in the regions to foment civil disobedience there.<sup>42</sup> However, no student representatives negotiated with Abboud and they were not represented in the transitional government after it was formed on 30 October, in spite of the Professional Front pushing for student representation.<sup>43</sup> Therefore, while the students may have been the initiators of the Revolution, they were not its leaders.

What the students did achieve was to bring the university into the public eye and effect a significant change in the relationship between themselves and urban society at large. Fathi Fadl remembers October causing a 'big boost' in the attitude of the public towards the university, recalling that when he rode shared taxis, his travel companions refused to let him pay.<sup>44</sup> Hasan al-Turabi refers to the October Revolution as the event that enabled the students of the university to finally breach the divide between the Sudanese public and the higher education institutes, which he claims the British established so that universities would become akin to a *khalwa* (a secluded religious school) for 'elitism and reflection'.<sup>45</sup> Thus, at least for al-Turabi, October can be seen as the moment in which the Manichaean divide between the Sudanese public and the elite educational institutions established by the British was broken down; Sudanese society



had begun to put the universities to its own use. The years following October would certainly witness a significant expansion in the social base of the Sudanese university system.<sup>46</sup>

At the same time, the clashes between students and police appear to have engendered somewhat more negative transformations in student society. The inimical yet intimate relationship between them seems almost to have provoked the former to mimic the latter. In the buildup to the 21 October seminar, a number of students attempted to stir up the atmosphere at the lunch-break in the university by launching what Shamouq describes as a 'military parade' from the dining hall to the seminar hall, chanting 'left ... right ... left ... right'.<sup>47</sup> They prepared for the seminar by gathering tree branches, bricks and thick sticks, and even surrounded the location of the seminar with barbed wire in an effort to prevent the police from gaining access.<sup>48</sup> When the battle between police and students broke out, the students reciprocated a great deal of the police violence, beating policemen up and throwing them off balconies in the student dormitories.<sup>49</sup> While the students' battle with the police would be heroicized in the aftermath of the Revolution, these experiences can also be seen as prototypical of the violent relationship between communist and Islamist students from the later 1960s onwards.

## The secondary schools

While the students of the University of Khartoum held centre stage on 21 October, it was probably the secondary school pupils who added most of the bulk to the demonstrations. They were numerically far stronger, and just as politicized. El Tayeb Mustafa, a secondary school student in the October 1964, recalls that while the political environment in the university was mature, in the secondary schools 'there was *passion*'.<sup>50</sup> Secondary schools, which catered to students between the ages of 15 and 18, usually represented a Sudanese teenager's first serious induction into the world of politics. As seen above, there was a secret communist cell at al-Iashir secondary school that Ahmad al-Qurayshi, at least purportedly, joined prior to becoming a Khartoum University student. There was often intense competition between the Brotherhood and the communists for the allegiance of new pupils.<sup>51</sup> In spite of this, El Tayeb Mustafa claims that the majority of those who demonstrated in October were members of the 'coca-cola party', that is they were not politicized in any way.<sup>52</sup>

The school pupils were aware of the importance of the 21 October seminar and a number of them tried to attend it, but were turned away by university students on the basis that they might be hurt.<sup>53</sup> Nevertheless, masses of secondary school pupils absconded from their studies to participate in al-Qurayshi's funeral procession the next day.<sup>54</sup> It was also the school pupils who led the demonstrations that initiated the Revolution in the provinces, since the universities themselves were all located in Khartoum. Secondary students played major roles in sparking the Revolution in towns such as Shendi, Kosti, Wad Madani, Atbara, al-Iashir, Nyala, al-Ubayyid and Port Sudan.<sup>55</sup> A journalist in Shendi described the secondary pupils as the 'forerunners' (*subbaqat*) of the Revolution there.<sup>56</sup> The fact that these schools all shared a joint

wireless network certainly helped to facilitate and coordinate the mobilization of these pupils.<sup>57</sup> Where there were no secondary schools, the provincial uprisings were often begun by the intermediate and primary school students. This was the case in Sinnar.<sup>58</sup>

Observing the role of school pupils enables us to further comprehend the agency of the educated youth in 1964. It was they who initiated and galvanized a number of the protests, especially on a regional level. Nevertheless, the fact that the role of the educated youth during the October Revolution was so significant distinguishes it from other experiences of civil unrest in Africa where the economically marginalized urban youth were a more dominant presence on the streets. It was the privileged access that these school pupils had to modern institutions and modern technology that enabled them to communicate and mobilize so successfully. This illustrates why civil action during the October Revolution was so effective, but also reminds us of its elite nature.

### The Revolution matures: The emergence of the professional front

While the youth of the universities and secondary schools helped to provoke the Revolution, and added the manpower, it was those who had already graduated who had the maturity and influence to give it its shape. Initially, their participation was on a spontaneous and individual basis, as professionals who had been present at the seminar visited and notified other professionals, judges obtained permissions for professionals and students to meet, and doctors clashed angrily with the police who attempted to interfere with the treatment of wounded students.<sup>59</sup> The lecturers and lawyers were the first two groups of professionals to begin to take action as corporate bodies. With the exception of Nadhir Dafa'allah and a number of other senior members of the administration who endeavoured to dissuade the students from staging the funeral procession, the university lecturers participated as a group in the demonstrations. Al-Qurayshi's funeral bier (*na'ash*) was borne by four lecturers.<sup>60</sup> It was the lecturers who first proposed the formation of a Professional Front on 22 October, and provided the Lecturers' Club to act as its meeting place.<sup>61</sup> The lecturers also submitted their own petition on 24 October, condemning the al-Qurayshi's killing and calling for the military regime to be toppled.<sup>62</sup> Although it was lecturers from a Muslim Brother background who had stood out in the debates that preceded the Revolution, after 22 October the academic contribution to the protests was more politically eclectic. The lecturers who met with the lawyers to participate in the declaration of the general strike on 24 October included the SCP-affiliated Ali Muhammad Khair, former communist Ahmad Abd al-Halim and independent Mekki Shibeika.<sup>63</sup> However, by this stage the Bar Association had really come to be a driving force.

The manner in which the Bar Association intervened in the Revolution illustrated the fact that throughout October 1964, professional and social solidarities often preceded party affiliation. Ostensibly it was leftist in inclination. Three months before October, it had resolved that its members would refuse to cooperate with a judge who

had handed out jail sentences to a number of alleged SCP members.<sup>64</sup> When the two communist lawyers who acted as their defendants, Farouk Abu Eissa and Ahmad Sulayman, were charged with contempt of court for objecting to the political nature of the trial, the Bar Association formed a 12-man team to defend them. What is interesting is that in spite of the fact that this case was primarily of interest to the SCP, lawmen of all political affiliations volunteered for the defence team. They included the Islamic Liberation Front's Mirghani al-Nasri, NUP man Mubarak Zarroug and Muhammad Ahmad Mahgub of the Umma Party.<sup>65</sup>

It was perhaps this tendency for the professional ethos to supersede party politics that allowed the Bar Association to play such a significant role in mobilizing the anti-regime campaign after al-Qurayshi's death. For instance, on the night of 21 October, it was Uthman Khalid Medawi, a Muslim Brother, who phoned his communist fellow lawman Farouk Abu Eissa to encourage him to attend al-Qurayshi's funeral procession the next morning.<sup>66</sup> After the funeral procession and the subsequent demonstrations, the chairman of the Bar Association, Abdin Isma'il, hosted a meeting of students, lawyers, judges and lecturers in his office, in which the formation of a 'Professional Front' was first discussed and the idea of a political strike mooted.<sup>67</sup> It has been claimed by some – although these claims have been frequently disputed – that it was the Ba'athist lawyer Shawgi Mallasi who proposed the strike and the Umma Party man Muhammad Ahmad Mahgub, who had attended the meeting of his fellow party members at the Imam al-Hadi's house on the morning of 22 October, who seconded it.<sup>68</sup> While these claims remain hugely controversial, it is certainly significant that representatives of these parties were involved at all in the discussions over the political strike. Both these parties identified with nationalist rather than communist political philosophies, which reminds us that the tactic of the general strike could be envisioned as a tool of national liberation as much as socialist revolution, as was the case in Egypt and Syria earlier in the twentieth century.<sup>69</sup>

The methods used by the lawyers and judges to organize the professionals' demonstration of 24 October illustrated the extent to which the social interconnectedness of the riverain professional elite facilitated mobilization against the regime. On the evening of 22 October, a group of lawyers including Babikir Awadallah, Shawgi Mallasi and Abdin Isma'il travelled around those of the various wedding parties occurring in Khartoum that night that they knew their closest colleagues to be attending, obtaining signatures for their memorandum of protest and arranging the procession that would occur 2 days later.<sup>70</sup> Sudanese weddings are usually attended by hundreds of people, and thus would have provided the perfect cover for this socially interwoven group of professionals to operate within. Sudanese are fond of saying that it is the sheer strength of their society that has limited authoritarianism in their country; the fact that these lawmen were able to utilize social events to garner support for their anti-government campaign was a perfect example of this. It also reminds us of the extent to which the Revolution was organized in 'secular' spaces.

The judges and lawyers led a demonstration from the judiciary building towards the Republican Palace, bearing their memorandum of protest. Critically, the judges also declared that al-Qurayshi's shooting should be treated as an intentional homicide.<sup>71</sup> Although the police, acknowledging the legal authority of the judiciary, dispersed at the



command of judge Abd al-Majid Imam, the army proved more reticent and dispersed the demonstration after allowing a few of its members to present the memorandum to Abboud at the palace.<sup>72</sup> In the immediate aftermath of this demonstration, Abdin Isma'il, partially in protest at the means used to disperse it, declared a general strike from the roof of the main judiciary building in order to 'continue the struggle against military government'.<sup>73</sup>

The doctors were the other major union to flex their political muscles at this point, issuing a petition of complaint to match the others. The manner in which the Doctors' Union joined the Revolution further illustrated the extent to which informal social ties helped generate professional mobilization. Farouk Abu Eissa initially called upon Muhammad Ahmad Mahgub to persuade the reluctant secretary general of the union, his cousin and fellow Umma man Abd al-Halim Muhammad, to instruct the physicians to enter the professionals' demonstration. However, when Mahgub's efforts failed, they approached a number of other members of the union including the former communist Taha Ba'asher and Umma man Salah Abd al-Rahman Ali Taha who agreed to bypass their chief and bring the doctors into the anti-regime front.<sup>74</sup> The doctors also offered their headquarters in Khartoum as a base for the Professional Front for its 26 October meeting, as the Lecturer's Club had begun to attract too much attention.<sup>75</sup> Others have claimed that the decision to move to this new location was a deliberate ploy by Hasan al-Turabi to exploit the fact that government attention was focused on the leftist lawmen to strengthen Muslim Brotherhood representation within the Front.<sup>76</sup> However, the collaboration between SCP-affiliated and Umma-affiliated physicians suggests that the doctors' contribution was largely non-partisan.

The predominance of the professionals in the anti-regime movement became clearer as the base of operations shifted to the Omdurman house of Abd al-Rahman al-Amin, a politically neutral civil servant in the ministry of agriculture, on 27 October. Al-Amin names around twenty doctors, lawyers, civil servants and lecturers who were at the forefront of this decisive meeting. He also notes that around fifteen workers' trade union representatives appeared, but states he cannot remember their names 'because I did not know them before'.<sup>77</sup> Meanwhile, of the five representatives this meeting dispatched to negotiate with the parties gathered at the *gubba*, only one, Shaikh al-Amin Muhammad al-Amin, was present on behalf of a working-class union.<sup>78</sup> There was no workers' or farmers' representative in the 5-man delegation of the party and professional delegates that met to negotiate with Abboud later that evening.<sup>79</sup> This indicates that the workers were at this point on the margins of a movement that was centred around a socially interconnected group of professionals.

## Workers in the 1964 Revolution

The naming of the body that ultimately came to embody the aspirations of both the professional associations and the labour unions as the 'Professional Front', or *Jabha al-Ha'iat*, is indicative of the dominance of the former within the anti-regime movement. It could be argued that the relatively slow response of the workers' unions indicated their lack of sympathy with the anti-regime movement. For instance, Al-Turabi



contends that the tardy appearance of the Gezira Tenants' Association – which represented the agricultural labourers working on the cotton schemes of the Blue Nile – reflected the lukewarm attitude of its political ally, the SCP, towards the Revolution.<sup>30</sup> This is somewhat unfair. Not only did the SCP have a significant and, in some cases, dominant presence among the various professional unions as well as workers' unions in any case, but the main reason that the professionals played such a predominant role was also the opportunity granted to them by their proximity to events. The lecturers were closest of all after the Revolution broke out at the university; and the doctors became involved as soon as al-Qurayshi was taken to Khartoum hospital. The judges, civil servants and lawyers all had institutional headquarters in Khartoum, whereas major workers' unions such as the railway union and the Gezira Tenants' Association were principally located in provincial towns such as Atbara farther away from the outbreak of the Revolution.

The over-representation of the professionals did not do justice to the extent of the participation of urban labourers in the Revolution, or their contribution to the struggle against Abboud throughout the 6 years that he was in power. While the professionals probably had a more significant role in the Revolution itself, the trade unions had a more consistent track record of opposition to the November Regime and, indeed, to both the colonial and parliamentary regimes that preceded it. In the late colonial period, strikes launched by institutions such as the 'Taxi Workers' Union and the Railway Workers' Affairs Association were seen not just as sectoral battles, but as part of the overall battle to paralyse the apparatus of the colonial state.<sup>31</sup>

Workers' organizations were also prominently involved in national politics in the early post-colonial period. In the month before Abboud's coup, the labour unions had been at the forefront of the protest against the previous government's acceptance of American aid.<sup>32</sup> As a result, the Novemberists, who maintained the economic relationship with America that had been developed by their parliamentary predecessors, attempted to demolish the Sudanese labour movement when they came to power. They dissolved all the major trade unions, in addition to the Sudan Workers' Trade Unions Federation (SWTUF), the leaders of which, including its communist secretary general, Shafi' Ahmad al-Shaikh, were arrested.<sup>33</sup> They repealed the 1948 Labour Law, replacing it in 1960 with new legislation that sanctioned the re-emergence of trade unions, but with severe legal limits imposed on their freedom of organization.<sup>34</sup> In 1961, the Sudan Railway Workers' Union, the most powerful of all the Sudanese labour unions, attempted to defy these restrictions by launching a 7-day strike, to which the government responded by dissolving it.<sup>35</sup>

Abboud's regime made a number of efforts to restore its legitimacy among the urban workforce by establishing more pliable trade union leaderships.<sup>36</sup> On 16 August 1963, it invited 350 delegates representing 43 unions to a 'Conference of Workers' Trade Unions' in Khartoum. This was perhaps inspired by the 'corporatist' strategies of Gamal Nasser, who had in 1961 established a 'National Congress for Popular Forces' to represent workers' and peasants' bodies.<sup>37</sup> However, Abboud did not have the same radical credentials as Nasser and while the conference was intended to display solidarity between the regime and organized labour, it developed into a vociferous anti-government protest, with the workers demanding that the 1960 act be repealed

and that both the Sudan Railway Workers' Union and SWTUF be re-instated.<sup>88</sup> The government was forced to back down and allow the re-emergence of the two bodies that it had outlawed, in addition to the modification – although not the cancellation – of the 1960 act.<sup>89</sup> Following this meeting, workers' representatives took it upon themselves to re-establish the SWTUF and appoint a new executive committee, scheduling 15 August 1964 as the date on which a new conference would be held to bring the Federation back into being.<sup>90</sup> However, on 13 August, the government intervened once more to cancel it outright, dissolving the newly formed committee and replacing it with a new one that comprised the leaders of the ten largest labour unions.<sup>91</sup> Thus, the workers had a considerably lengthier track record of protest against the regime than the professionals did, right up to the months that preceded the Revolution itself. However, their demands were mainly restricted to economic questions and the issue of labour rights. Unlike the professionals, they had not produced a calculated plan of action to unseat the regime.

Analyses of labour protest in the Middle East tend to observe the role of workers' unions in waging the battle for social and political rights and the preservation of moral economies rather than looking at them as makers or breakers of regimes,<sup>92</sup> and the Sudanese case probably justifies this approach. However, while they did not plan the October Revolution, the contribution of the workers to the civil protests was significant. Although they did not dominate the protests at the university and professional headquarters, the urban labourers were not completely distant from them either. While the University of Khartoum acted as the cradle of the Revolution, it is worth remembering that a workers' representative, Sayyid al-Tuhami, spoke at the 10 October seminar.<sup>93</sup> When Abd al-Khaliq Mahgub attended al-Qurayshi's funeral march on 22 October, he was initially frustrated at the lack of worker representation and thus left the procession briefly to bring in Eid Bayyin Sayyid, a member of the Sudan Railway Workers' Union who would also attend the meeting in Abdin Isma'il's office later in the day.<sup>94</sup> It was on Friday 23 October that the re-emerging SWTUF first sent a formal representative, al-Haj Abd al-Rahman, to join the professional gatherings and support their plans for a protest against the regime.<sup>95</sup>

Although it is true that up until 24 October the workers had participated only as individuals, after this point they acted as the foot-soldiers of the general strike.<sup>96</sup> Although the Novemberists had managed to undermine the established union leaderships, leftist influence within these leaderships was too strong to be purged completely.<sup>97</sup> Moreover, leftists and 'democrats' within the labour movement had managed to establish shadow leaderships under the aegis of what became known as the 'Trade Union Front' (*al-Jabha al-Niqabiyya*), and this body coordinated with the Professional Front and made a major contribution towards the general strike.<sup>98</sup> The participation of the railway workers in the general strike was particularly significant, since they threatened to cut off the capital from its oil supplies.<sup>99</sup> Workers in the Posts and Telegraphs Department also played a crucial role in enabling the Professional Front to control communications networks.<sup>100</sup>

The Revolution also offered the labour unions the opportunity to overthrow the leaderships that had been manipulated by the Abboud Regime and to hold genuinely open and democratic elections. Following the downfall of the November Regime, eighty-nine separate labour unions participated in new elections for the secretariat of

the Sudan Workers' Federation, and chose Shafi' Ahmad al-Shaikh to be the workers' representative in the 1964–5 transitional government.<sup>101</sup> Although al-Shaikh was a communist, Awadallah Ibrahim, who became the president of the new SWTUF, was not a member of the party and his deputy, Mahjub al-Zubayr, was an NUP man.<sup>102</sup> It would thus be fair to say that the workers' bodies created by the Revolution were relatively broad in terms of their political composition, and not simply pawns of the SCP. This further illustrates the point that no one party had a monopoly on the 'modern forces' during the Revolution.

Although the labour unions seized a number of the opportunities provided by the outbreak of the civil protests, the fact that their status within the anti-regime movement remained limited in comparison with that of the professional elite reminds us that the Revolution still had a very narrowly defined leadership. The fact that the majority of these professionals hailed from the comparatively homogenous northern riverain region of Sudan also reminds us that the concept of the 'Modern Forces' excluded a great number of Sudanese. One significant exception to this rule was Abd al-Majid Imam, who led the judges' demonstration on 24 October and was also at the forefront of the march to the Palace on 28 October. Although born in Omdurman, he traced his roots to the Nuba Mountains in South Kordofan, and thus represented something of an outsider figure in the politics of the riverain north. Shawgi Mallasi maintains that shortly before the October Revolution, Abd al-Majid Imam had engaged in a verbal confrontation with his fellow justice Babikir Awadallah at a diplomatic party after hearing the latter remark, 'If the matter was in my hands, I would wipe out all the southerners' during a discussion on the conflict with the Anya-Nya.<sup>103</sup> In spite of Abd al-Majid Imam being at the forefront of the 24 and 28 October demonstrations, it was Babikir Awadallah who went on to become Chief Justice of Sudan following the uprising. Abd al-Majid Imam would later join the Sudan National Front, a 1970s Nuba Mountains regionalist party that sponsored a coup attempt against Nimeiri in 1975.<sup>104</sup> This reminds us that while the Revolution did empower the youthful, university-educated elite, ethnic considerations informed the manner in which it did so.

## Student activism and the April *Intifada*

Just as in 1964, the student unions acted as the initiators of the 1985 uprising. Even Mirghani al-Nasri, the head of the Bar Association during the *Intifada*, acknowledges that campus protesters provided the 'first spark of that uprising... around which citizens gathered from every side'.<sup>105</sup> Indeed, such is the importance of the student unions in provoking anti-regime dissidence in Sudan that we have to investigate the nature of student politics in the years preceding the uprising to understand why, in spite of the many crises of the May Regime, the students had not toppled it already. This can be explained by the dominance that the ICF exercised over the student unions in the 1970s and early 1980s, and the close relationship between the ICF and the regime after the 1977 reconciliation.

As far as the University of Khartoum was concerned, Nimeiri's 'corporatist' strategy was a dismal failure. After its establishment in 1973, the Sudanese Socialist Union



attempted to set up a branch at the university, but it was unable to impose itself on a thoroughly anti-authoritarian student body.<sup>106</sup> KUSU, under ICF leadership, nearly brought the regime to heel when it instigated the Sha'aban Riots of 1973, but after the 1977 reconciliation, there was a tacit understanding between Nimeiri and the ICF leadership that the regime would allow the Islamic Movement a degree of influence in the government so long as it kept its unruly students in check. From the late 1960s onwards, the ICF had ruled the student unions in Khartoum with an iron fist – or more specifically, an iron rod.<sup>107</sup> Pro-ICF students wielded iron rods in 'campus wars' to impose their agenda and intimidate their opponents, and this new culture of violence went hand in hand with the Islamist dominance of the student union executives.<sup>108</sup>

Because of the expansion of the secondary school system, a far greater number of Sudanese students in this period came from Sudan's socially conservative rural peripheries – and they, being simultaneously isolated from the rural 'sectarian' networks and alienated by urban lifestyles, provided a natural constituency for the ICF.<sup>109</sup> This made it possible for the ICF to, in effect, control the universities on behalf of the regime. The 'Islamic Way' even established its own security wing at the university, the 'Information Bureau' (*maktab al-ma'lumat*), which collaborated with the SSO to expose SCP networks in both the universities and secondary schools.<sup>110</sup> In 1978, the British Ambassador reported that Hasan al-Turabi had admitted to him that the reason why KUSU had not joined other branches of the modern sector in demonstrating against the regime that year was 'trouble among them would be laid at his, Turabi's door, and he did not want his relationship with Nimeiri jeopardised'.<sup>111</sup>

The quiescence of the students was critical to Nimeiri's survival. Following further economic deterioration and public protest in 1979, the British Ambassador admitted 'Had the students, whom history shows have the power to bring down governments, taken to the streets *en masse* in August, and had it been necessary to call in the army, which is not trained in riot control, there might have been serious bloodshed and the government would probably have fallen'.<sup>112</sup> However, attempting to keep the favour of the regime and the student movement was a difficult balancing act for al-Turabi, as he himself admitted.<sup>113</sup> Although the students did not attempt to topple the regime in 1979, KUSU did protest against the visit of Anwar Sadat to the country and Nimeiri's support of the Camp David Peace Agreement between Sadat and Israel.<sup>114</sup> Ali Uthman Taha claimed after the *Intifada* that this demonstrated the ICF's opposition to the regime;<sup>115</sup> in reality, it occurred in the context of growing disillusionment among the student Islamists at the ICF leadership's alliance with the government. Later in the year, the Islamic Way was defeated in the KUSU elections for the first time in 7 years, by an alliance of other student groups.<sup>116</sup>

What was crucial about March 1985 was that at this time, all but one of the major student unions, probably for the first time since the beginning of the May Regime, were led by coalitions of student political groups opposed to the ICF. The 'independent' student union at the University of Cairo Khartoum Branch comprised a number of anti-ICF student parties linked to the main political parties – for instance, Muhammad Akasha, the head of the union, represented the DUP.<sup>117</sup> In 1984, the ICF lost the student union at Omdurman Islamic University, probably the most socially conservative of all the Sudanese universities, and a long-term stronghold of the Islamic movement, to a similar



independent coalition headed by an Umma Party representative, Muhammad Ahmad Salame.<sup>118</sup> KUSU, which had been regained by the Islamists for a period of 4 years after the 1979 defeat, was then lost again in 1984, by a narrow margin, to another opposition coalition incorporating students affiliated to the Umma, DUP, Communists, Republican Brothers, Nasserists and southern political forces.<sup>119</sup> The emergence of a 'Congress of Sudanese Students' in 1979, which echoed the old Democratic Socialist student party of the 1950s and 1960s in advocating a centrist and nationalist political agenda, played a significant role in this defeat.<sup>120</sup> The new union, headed by Umar Digeir, had a series of run-ins with the SSO in the buildup to March 1985.<sup>121</sup>

Students were just as affected by the deteriorating economic situation as every other social sector. They were concerned by the lack of potential job prospects upon their graduating and the fact that not enough oil was available to school buses to ferry them in to work. However, the economic circumstances had been bad for a number of years; what was new in March 1985 was that with the exception of the Technical Institute, which was still under the control of the Islamic Way, the student unions were controlled by political groupings that were determined to overthrow the regime. Of these unions, it was the one at Omdurman Islamic University that played the greater role in initiating the protests – Khartoum University students were on holiday at the time, and the University of Cairo union had been undermined by the arrests of leading Ba'athist students before the *Intifada*.<sup>122</sup> The students of Omdurman Islamic University led the way with their demonstration on 26 March, to be followed by the students of the Institute of Technological Colleges (the old 'Technical Institute') on 27 March and those of the University of Cairo Khartoum Branch on 28 March.<sup>123</sup> On 31 March, the SSO raided the University of Khartoum and announced the arrest of a number of 'Ba'athists and Communists'.<sup>124</sup> While the students did not exactly drive Nimeiri out of power by themselves, these demonstrations provided the context for the parties to begin mobilizing themselves and the unions to launch their campaign of civil disobedience.

Were the demonstrations of 26–28 April campus initiatives or were they planned by the political parties, which acted as 'mother' organizations to the various student political groups? As demonstrated above, Islamist students had refrained from launching demonstrations in the 1970s under orders from their party command, and former Umma Party students at Omdurman Islamic University now allege that they did so again in 1985.<sup>125</sup> As seen in the previous chapter, the Umma Party asserted after the *Intifada* that it had coordinated with the students of Omdurman Islamic University to provoke the 1985 demonstration. However, the protest that sparked the *Intifada* was, in reality, a product of both party planning and spontaneous student mobilization. In 1984, recognizing the university as a stronghold of the *Ansar* movement and a potential weapon to use against the regime, the Umma leadership chose to appoint three students who had graduated that year, Isma'il Adam Ali, Musa Na'im and Hamad al-Zunari, as heads of the '*Ansar* organization' in the university.<sup>126</sup> These individuals would help in the campaign to capture the union on behalf of the Umma's student wing later in 1984. However, Isma'il Adam Ali insists that the decision to launch the 26 March protest was a spontaneous reaction to Nimeiri's unpopular speech the day before, and while the *Ansar* student leaders visited al-Sadiq al-Mahdi on the same day

to seek his blessing and support, it was not inspired by any direct command from the party leadership.<sup>127</sup>

Nevertheless, the fact that the student organizations that led the civil protests named themselves after, and coordinated directly with, their more mature equivalents illustrates just how potent these parties still were. Given that a considerable degree of political freedom obtained in the university environment at this time, it acted as a sphere in which political forces that had reached a stalemate within the wider national arena could compete to mobilize the same student body that had broken the previous military regime on their behalf. The various non-ICF parties' seizure of the student unions in the period leading up to March 1985 was thus a critical factor in the outbreak of the *Intifada* itself.

### The professionals challenge Nimeiri

While the students may have been the initiators, the professional movement once more acted as the spearhead of the protest. However, one key difference regarding professional activism in the April *Intifada* was that by 1985, most of these bodies had already engaged in a number of highly politicized strikes in the years preceding the overthrow of the regime. These strikes began in the late 1970s and became increasingly intense in the early 1980s. They were often connected to the specific interests of the relevant unions, but also reflected a much broader discontent with Nimeiri's mismanagement of the economic and political situation. Their context was the increasing decline of state funding for professional services and the mass migration of qualified professionals to the Gulf, where far greater salaries could be reaped. They also showed the urban elite's distaste for Nimeiri's increasing political tyranny and lack of respect for the law.

There is a degree of confusion as to the origins of the Union Alliance/National Alliance that appeared in 1985. A number of individuals tend to trace its origins to the moment of their initial participation in the union protests and, in general, professionals tend to argue that it emerged later on simply because the professional activism entered its most active phase in the second half of the Nimeiri regime.<sup>128</sup> Workers' activists tend to trace it back to the Sha'aban Riots of 1973, when the idea of a worker-student alliance was mooted, ironically, by the Islamist KUSU head Ahmad Uthman Mekki.<sup>129</sup>

In 1978, doctors, schoolteachers, government technicians, book-keepers and cashiers all went on strike.<sup>130</sup> The doctors struck again in the summer of 1979, and at one point the entire Central Committee of the union offered its collective resignation.<sup>131</sup> These initial strikes focused largely on the professional interests of the unions.<sup>132</sup> In the early 1980s, this began to change. In February 1981, the judges went on strike protesting against the introduction of new regulations that removed some of the service benefits that they had previously enjoyed.<sup>133</sup> However, their demands also constituted a direct attack on Nimeiri's regime. During the strike, the judges issued a statement following a seminar held in the University of Khartoum in which they condemned Nimeiri's interference with the principle of the independence of the judiciary and the use of his State Security Laws to bypass the regular judicial process.<sup>134</sup> However, neither this

strike nor the ones that preceded it were coordinated with other unions and they were, thus, limited in what they were able to achieve.

The first professionals' strike to achieve a real political impact was that by the judges in 1983. Their action was a response to Nimeiri's open criticisms of the judiciary and Bar Association, along with his decision to strip a number of leading judges of their positions.<sup>135</sup> It persisted for 3 months, and acquired particular support from the university lecturers, the lawyers and the students.<sup>136</sup> The Bar Association held open seminars throughout the period of this strike, which were attended by members of several professional associations including lecturers, bank clerks, doctors and engineers, and provided an opportunity for vehement criticism of Nimeiri's regime.<sup>137</sup> The broad support that was offered to the judges ultimately compelled Nimeiri to relent and re-instate a number of those whom he had fired, and to offer them higher salaries and increased benefits.<sup>138</sup> The impact of this strike was significant in that it created a belief among the professional unions that coordinated action against the regime could force it to back down, and led to a series of meetings throughout the next 2 years with the object of arranging further protests.<sup>139</sup> Moreover, it was Nimeiri's recognition that he could not rely on the existing legal establishment that led him to attempt to bypass it through his disastrous entanglement with the ICF and the 'Instantaneous Justice Courts'.<sup>140</sup> The strike thus contributed directly to Nimeiri's most self-destructive acts.

The next year, the university professors, judges and doctors all went on strike. The doctors' action in particular was crucial since it led to a re-enactment of the scenario in which Nimeiri first adopted an obstinate stance and then was forced into a humiliating U-turn. When the doctors resigned *en masse* following the president's refusal to acknowledge their pay demands, he threatened to have them prosecuted for high treason if they did not return to work within 72 hours.<sup>141</sup> The impasse lasted for over a month as Nimeiri dissolved the union, detained seventeen 'ringleaders' and then declared a state of emergency.<sup>142</sup> At this stage, other professional associations began to approach the doctors and inform them that they considered their strike a national, not a sectoral, one and began to provide them with financial assistance to keep it going.<sup>143</sup> With the engineers and accountants threatening to join in the action and the World Health Organization declaring its intention to label Sudan a no go zone,<sup>144</sup> Nimeiri was forced once more to back down. He released all the imprisoned doctors and promised them that their demands would be met.<sup>145</sup> The strike was particularly significant in that the doctors claimed it represented not just their own professional demands, but also a political protest against the deterioration level of health services available to the average citizen in the later years of the Nimeiri regime.<sup>146</sup> It shows us that the professional unions had demonstrated their capacity to bring the regime to heel even before they actually helped to overthrow it.

One of the most important points to be understood about the role of the professional unions in Nimeiri's downfall is that no one political party exercised direct influence over any of the professional bodies at this time. This was partially because the ICI; the party that had come closest to achieving intellectual hegemony over Sudan's middle classes, had lost a degree of support among the unions because of its refusal to support the demand for increases in salary.<sup>147</sup> The success of professional activism during the *Intifada* represented a fruition of the cooperation between men who espoused a wide



range of political ideologies, whether they were communists, Islamists, Ba'athists or genuine independents.

The Bar Association was indicative of the ideological diversity of the professional movement. Umar Abd al-Ati, the vice-president of the Association at the time of the *Intifada*, claims that it was controlled by men of independent outlook, who had succeeded in the 1983 elections in gaining control back from those of a more ideological persuasion.<sup>148</sup> Nevertheless, there were still four 'communists' in addition to the five or six independents, and the head of the union, Mirghani al-Nasri, was a former *Ikhwani* of liberal Islamist persuasions. Mirghani al-Nasri had established the first branch of the Islamic Liberation Movement at Hantoub in 1949, and co-founded the Islamic Socialist Party alongside Babikir Karrar in 1964.<sup>149</sup> It is worth remembering that the Islamic Socialist Party represented itself as more of a liberal and a more 'Sudanese' party than al-Turabi's Islamic Charter Front,<sup>150</sup> which would explain why al-Nasri was able to coordinate with non-Islamists more effectively. Nevertheless, al-Nasri was relatively supportive of the pro-NIF regime installed in 1989 and when he died in 2010, his funeral was attended by Umar al-Bashir and Ali Uthman Taha.<sup>151</sup> This suggests that the lawyers' activism during the *Intifada* represented not simply a secularist backlash against the 'Islamization' of the legislation in 1983, but also a broader response from a legal elite frustrated by both Nimeiri's abuse of religion and his efforts to marginalize them.

Men of different political persuasions were all united by their opposition to the political trials staged by Nimeiri in January and February 1985. Ghazi Suleiman, then a leftist, recalls that Mirghani al-Nasri agreed with him that he should take a group of lawyers with him to defend Mahmud Muhammad Taha while al-Nasri himself would defend the Nuba politician Philip Abbas Ghaboush, whose trial was happening simultaneously.<sup>152</sup> Meanwhile, a number of prominent lawyers defended the Ba'ath Party members put on trial by Nimeiri in February, including some with close affiliations to the party.<sup>153</sup> The political diversity of the union was demonstrated by the wide range of opinions that were expressed within the union concerning the September Laws when they were promulgated by Nimeiri. Al-Ati recalls that members were divided between those who supported the laws, those who proposed that they needed modifications and those who suggested abolishing them outright.<sup>154</sup> Representatives of all these groups demonstrated together when the *Intifada* broke out. The secularist Ghazi Suleiman and Wisal al-Mahdi – Hasan al-Turabi's wife and another member of the union – would stand close to al-Ati when he read out the declaration of the *Intifada* on 3 May.<sup>155</sup>

The Doctors' Union was equally ideologically eclectic. Jizouli Dafa'allah, its president, was an independent Islamist who had been a Muslim Brotherhood leader at Khartoum University, but had avoided party politics ever since.<sup>156</sup> The Central Committee of the Doctors' Union was dominated by Muslim Brothers, although *Africa Confidential* claimed that on account of the ability of Jizouli Dafa'allah and 'the nationwide solidarity of the doctors', it transpired that 'the brothers have wielded little influence'.<sup>157</sup> It may, of course, have been the case that it was Jizouli Dafa'allah's background in the Muslim Brotherhood that made him acceptable to the *Ikhwanis* on the committee. Jizouli Dafa'allah's opponents in the Alliance later insisted that he was chosen as chairman of the union only because the doctors felt a figure more radically



opposed to the May Regime would not have succeeded in obtaining the doctors' demands, but such arguments implicitly acknowledge that the radicals in the union movement understood that they had to co-opt the pro-Islamist faction for their agenda to succeed.<sup>158</sup> Thus, it is important to remember that though the ICF did not participate actively in the uprising, this does not mean that the struggle of the professionals against the regime it had until so recently supported can be seen as a kind of Manichaean duel between secularism and Islamism – a number of non-ICF Islamists of more liberal persuasions played leading roles in the professionals' battle against Nimeiri.

The other significant professional unions that participated in the *Intifada* were led by men of at least nominally independent persuasion. Both Awad al-Karim Muhammad Ahmad of the Engineers' Union and Adlan Hardallo of the Khartoum University Lecturers' Union now deny that they are or ever have been communists, although they do observe that they have been labelled as such by many.<sup>159</sup> It was believed that the executive committee of the Engineers' Union were all linked to the SCP, but Awad al-Karim Muhammad Ahmad insists that only two or three of them were 'real' communists whereas the others were just 'sympathizers'.<sup>160</sup> Moreover, one of the major leaders of the Engineers' Union, Muhammad Ahmad Taha, would become a leading NIF figure in the 1990s.<sup>161</sup> This is further indicative of the ideological flexibility of the professional movement.

Part of the reason why there was such solidarity between the various professional unions at the time of the *Intifada* was that, as demonstrated above, they had already cooperated against Nimeiri a number of times before it actually broke out. Nimeiri's official dissolution of the various professional associations following the doctors' strike did not prevent their members from arranging political meetings in the lead-up to the *Intifada*. The relative independence of the University of Khartoum enabled it to act as a centre of opposition, while the other professional groupings contributed to a variety of seminars and symposiums critical of the regime.<sup>162</sup> A particularly important meeting was held in January 1985 after the execution of Mahmud Muhammad Taha, and it is to this meeting that most attribute the real solidification of the various unions into a coherent political front.<sup>163</sup> Nima'at Malik of the Health Workers' Union also identifies this as the moment in which the slogan of the 'political strike' was transformed into the slogan of 'a strike to bring down the regime'.<sup>164</sup>

The Union Alliance was also able to keep on organizing outside the university. The 1984 emergency law did not prevent the organization of social and cultural activities such as doctors' conferences, which provided an alternative space in which professionals could mobilize opposition to the regime.<sup>165</sup> Moreover, at this time it was still common in Sudan for young unmarried professionals to live together in a shared boarding house known as a *mez*. Thus such young professionals had access to an important space in which to organize and express discontent.<sup>166</sup> In Port Sudan, the doctors' *mez* was transformed into the headquarters for the 'Popular Alliance', a local equivalent of the National Alliance.<sup>167</sup> The fact that professionals at this time still hailed from a fairly narrow social and cultural base would have made it easier for political solidarity to develop within these shared accommodations.

What all this demonstrates is that, probably more than was the case in 1964, the various professional unions were all highly mobilized and well prepared for political

activity at the time that the *Intifada* broke out. However, it does not appear that they possessed a well-articulated strategy for effecting the removal of the regime. In spite of all their previous experience of conflict with Nimeiri, their activities during the *Intifada* were relatively knee-jerk and chaotic. The *Intifada* did not break out because the professional unions collectively proposed civil disobedience. The role of the professional unions in the *Intifada* began with the reaction of members of a single union, the Khartoum Hospital Doctors' Union, to the fallout of the students' and workers' demonstrations on 26 and 27 March 1985. The doctors were horrified at having to treat victims of the SSO who had been shot at close range by plain-clothes security men who had infiltrated the crowds.<sup>168</sup> As a result, the Khartoum Hospital doctors launched a 48-hour strike and sent delegates to the Central Committee of the main Doctors' Union under Jizouli Dafa'allah, which declared a general strike.<sup>169</sup> Professional mobilization during the *Intifada* was, therefore, largely spontaneous in nature.

After the declaration of the doctors' strike, the other professionals began to organize themselves in a somewhat frenetic manner. The Doctors' Union and Bar Association arranged a meeting with the other professional bodies that had been active against the regime during the period leading up to 1985. The planning was very spontaneous – Jizouli Dafa'allah had dispatched members of the Doctors' Union to meet the engineers and the lawyers and arrange a meeting at the house of al-Mirghani al-Nasri, but was surprised by a visit from Mukhtar Uthman of the Engineers' Union who informed him that a meeting had already been arranged at the house of the head of the Engineers' Union, Awad al-Karim Muhammad Ahmad, in al-Ushara.<sup>170</sup> This meeting was attended by representatives of five professionals' unions – the lawyers, insurance brokers, doctors, engineers and Khartoum University lecturers.<sup>171</sup> It appears to have been this meeting that laid the groundwork for the general strike, although Jizouli Dafa'allah insisted that for the strike to work it would be necessary to call one other professional group to join the fold – the bank clerks, who had the power to cripple the economy. Jizouli Dafa'allah chose to contact their union through its secretary Hasan Muhammad Ali, consulting his own neighbour to get a rough description of where his house was located and then dispatching Muhammad Yasin of the Doctors' Union to Omdurman to find it.<sup>172</sup> When Muhammad Yasin eventually discovered his house in al-Thawra district of Omdurman, he found that Hasan Muhammad Ali had gone to the neighbourhood of Um Bedda, but he followed him to there and arranged for him to attend the next meeting of the various unions, which was at the University of Khartoum the following day.<sup>173</sup> This further illustrates the impromptu manner in which the professional unions mobilized during the *Intifada*.

The spontaneity of professional mobilization during the *Intifada* was also illustrated by the proceedings of the next important meeting, which occurred at the Bar Association.<sup>174</sup> This meeting was attended by senior professional leaders and also by large numbers of lawyers who had travelled from all over Khartoum and the country at large to be there.<sup>175</sup> Apparently the gathering was so chaotic that between 12 and 15 senior professionals had to adjourn to al-Nasri's office, while his deputy Umar Abd al-Ati physically stood against the door to prevent the other lawyers from entering!<sup>176</sup> It appears to have been at this point that the professional leaders resolved to stage the decisive demonstration in which they would submit their memorandum of protest

to the palace, on 3 April, and first began to form a series of executive committees to lead their nascent political movement.<sup>177</sup> The meeting was then interrupted by SSO agents dispatched by the government to apprehend the senior members of the Bar Association, and it is claimed that Mirghani al-Nasri read out the declaration of the general strike even as the SSO men were entering the building.<sup>178</sup> However, the fact that these security operatives were unable to attach names to faces enabled a number of individuals to escape, including Umar Abd al-Ati. Jizouli Dafa'allah and Mirghani al-Nasri were less lucky.<sup>179</sup> Therefore, although the professional activists of 1985 had possessed more time in which to plan their struggle against the regime, in many ways their plans were executed a lot less smoothly than in 1964, when all but a couple of professional leaders managed to avoid arrest. This was probably a result of the greater efficiency of the state security services in 1985, which hampered the efforts of the professionals to meet openly.

After the detentions, the plans of the professional leaders still at liberty became even more frantic, as they were forced to change their dress and places of sleep to avoid the attention of state security.<sup>180</sup> With the majority of the original leaders of the Union Alliance under arrest or in hiding following the meeting at the Bar Association, the shadow committee met at the Graduates' Club on 2 April to prepare the statement that would be read to the demonstrators.<sup>181</sup> The production of the statement was also a somewhat rushed affair – it was written almost in darkness at the Graduates' Club, and then an attempt to print it failed because of lack of electricity, before one member of the shadow committee entered a friend's office and persuaded him to allow him to print 150 copies of the document without explaining what its purpose was!<sup>182</sup>

Meanwhile, also on 2 April, members of the shadow committee took the decision to contact the political parties, dispatching Amin Makki Madani to meet al-Sadiq al-Mahdi in his house in Omdurman.<sup>183</sup> The fact that Jizouli Dafa'allah later stated that personally he would not have sanctioned this move again demonstrates the impromptu nature of the decision-making, as well as the weakness of party-professional collaboration in the pre-*Intifada* period.<sup>184</sup> This acts as a reminder that the *Intifada*, because of its very spontaneity, left behind unresolved issues that would later come back to haunt its leaders – as will be seen in Chapter 7, the rift between the parties and professionals would undermine the National Alliance throughout the transitional period.

When the professional unions launched their planned demonstration on 3 April, they were again overtaken by events. Their own planned march was dwarfed by the sheer numbers of Sudanese citizens taking to the streets, and as a result the union leaders decided that it would not be necessary to present their memorandum to the palace, and that they would simply read out the declaration to the demonstrators.<sup>185</sup> They were unable to find the individual who had been chosen to read out the speech, and so Umar Abd al-Ati, who happened to be carrying a copy on his person at the time, substituted for him.<sup>186</sup> In the excitement and confusion, and with clashes between police and public threatening to break out, he shortened the prepared statement so as to keep to the main points.<sup>187</sup>

By highlighting the frenetic manner in which the professionals executed their plans during the *Intifada*, this study does not intend to undermine their importance



in providing it with a form of leadership. The purpose is to illustrate the fact that the professional unions had no 'grand design' to topple Nimeiri; although the desire to achieve this end existed before March 1985, there was no well-articulated strategy in place. This is amply illustrated by the fact that the 'declaration' of the *Intifada* was written the evening before it was read out to the crowds. The professional unions were reacting to events as much as they were creating them.

### The marginalization of the labour unions during the *Intifada*

It seemed that in 1985 the professionals were even more lukewarm about the involvement of the labour unions than they had been in 1964. 'It [the *Intifada*] was led by the educated class,' insists Jizouli Dafa'allah, noting that the Sudan Railway Workers' Union, the most powerful of all the labour unions, had not even joined the National Alliance by 1985.<sup>188</sup> This was not because of any natural enmity between the workers and the professionals, or because the workers were not committed to overthrowing Nimeiri. The workers had launched just as many protests and strikes since 1978 as had the professionals. However, Nimeiri and his regime had it within their power to employ far more ruthless and arbitrary methods when dealing with labour agitation, since workers were simply far more replaceable than professionals. In 1980, the Sudan Railway Workers' Union declared a strike, effectively bringing the Sudanese economy to a halt.<sup>189</sup> Nimeiri responded by ordering that all 45,000 members of the union be dismissed from their jobs, and by amending the labour laws to make strikes a treasonable act punishable by death.<sup>190</sup>

It was Nimeiri's ability to dominate the labour unions so ruthlessly that made it difficult for the professionals to trust them. He and the SSO had achieved a great deal of success in neutralizing the workers' unions by appointing leaders sympathetic to the regime and planting spies to report any signs of dissent to the security organs.<sup>191</sup> Unlike the professional and student unions, the labour unions were tightly controlled by parties linked to the SSU, whose success was aided by the regime's insistence that ballots in union elections be cast openly.<sup>192</sup> The nearest that independent labour leaders came to breaking this stranglehold was in 1979, when a candidate put forward by the 'Trade Union Alliance' – the organization sponsored by the Alliance of the Sudanese People – lost out by only four votes to the SSU candidate.<sup>193</sup> It was workers pressured by bosses affiliated to the government who were among the few that turned out for the embarrassingly weak pro-Nimeiri demonstration of 2 April.<sup>194</sup>

As a result of their vulnerability to manipulation by the regime, the leaders of the professional unions were nervous of bringing the workers' unions into the core of the anti-regime movement. Awad al-Karim Muhammad Ahmad admitted that he was unsure about who precisely in the labour unions he could contact because 'there are many opportunists in the workers' unions'.<sup>195</sup> However, individual contacts were made. Al-Taj Muhammad, the head of the Bus Drivers' Union, attended



the 17 January meeting that followed Mahmud Muhammad Taha's execution.<sup>196</sup> The lawyers, insurance brokers and Khartoum University teachers all developed contacts with independent union leaderships, such as those of the Storekeepers' Union, Agriculture Ministry Workers' Union and Civil Airplanes Workers' Union, throughout February 1985.<sup>197</sup> Part of the reason that the professionals delayed their procession until 3 April was to give the workers' unions time to organize themselves and enter the general strike.<sup>198</sup> However, when it came to the formation of the National Alliance, the workers' unions were conspicuously absent, and it was six professional unions that acted as initial signatories to the National Charter. One leader of the Trade Union Alliance, Hasan al-Tayyib, now claims that the labour unions were invited to the meeting of 5 April, but that the individual who was supposed to lead them to the meeting had vanished.<sup>199</sup> This again illustrates the limitations of worker/professional cooperation.

This is not to say that the urban workforce did not participate in the *Intifada* – it was just that they were not led by the executive bodies of their unions. For instance, in the period leading up to the *Intifada*, workers at the state-owned oil corporations had launched spontaneous protests against the governments' agreements with CHEVRON, without needing any direction from their unions.<sup>200</sup> Large numbers of labourers from the industrial region of Omdurman joined the students of Omdurman Islamic University during their procession of 26 March, and were followed by the workers of central Khartoum's industrial region the next day.<sup>201</sup> Workers at the central electricity board also had a major role in ensuring the success of civil disobedience when they left the board, taking its keys along with them, following the call for a general strike.<sup>202</sup> Railway workers played a major role in the demonstrations in Atbara that preceded the *Intifada*, which began with a demonstration by railwaymen demanding that the leadership of their union take a firmer stance against the regime's price rises.<sup>203</sup> However, it appears that they did not coordinate with the professionals in the capital until after Nimeiri's downfall. Abdullah Abd al-Wahhab, the President of the Textile Workers' Union states that this body, as well as other major labour unions such as the Housing Development Workers' Union and Government Vehicles Drivers' Union first entered into the general strike in coordination with the National Alliance at 10 a.m. on 6 April, that is just after Siwar al-Dahab's declaration that the army were 'siding with the people'.<sup>204</sup>

Just as in 1964, the greater social interconnectedness of the professional class ensured that it was they, rather than the labour leaders, who took the lead in the uprising. This was not necessarily the product of an elitist outlook, but rather reflected that fact that Nimeiri had been more successful in undermining the trade union leaderships and incorporating them to his regime than he had with the professionals. While the urban labour force contributed with just as much vigour to the *Intifada*, bringing transport and electricity to a halt and adding manpower to the demonstrations, it did so in a far more acephalous fashion. This was one reason that the *Intifada* ultimately came to disappoint so many sectors of urban society. The failure of the trade union leaderships to mobilize effectively before Siwar al-Dahab declared the beginning of the transitional period ensured that their political weight during the interim period would be substantially reduced.

## Conclusion

The weight of the contribution made by the 'modern forces' to the two uprisings cannot be questioned. In both 1964 and 1985, students acted as initiators, and although the more mature political forces would determine the ultimate fate of the uprisings, the fact that both uprisings were sparked off by protests within universities demonstrates the crucial significance of student activism in the downfall of both regimes. In 1964, the students of Khartoum University represented a pioneering generation heavily influenced by wider trends in international radical thought, and it was their dogged struggle against both the university administration and the ministry of interior that led to the events that galvanized the October Revolution. As a result, the uprising established a link between student life and the wider national political arena that would remain a key theme in Sudanese history up until the present. The university would remain at the centre of political life and the role played by the university-educated in public life expanded considerably – even during the two military regimes that followed October, Sudanese governments would never rely so much on uneducated soldiers for their ministers as they had before it.

The importance of student bodies to opposition politics was demonstrated in the second uprising by the fact that the various parties aligned against Nimeiri had to wait until they controlled all the major student unions in Khartoum before they were able to agitate successfully against the regime. The student body was probably more directly linked to the political parties in 1985 than it was in 1964 and the role of the students in 1985 was more the result of direction by the political parties. The conflict between various political alignments within the student body had become more obvious by the 1980s, and was centred on the competition between the groups sponsored by the ICF and coalitions of the various student bodies supported by the other political parties.

In 1964, the Islamists and their opponents within the student body had pursued subtly different and at times conflicting strategies, but had remained united by their shared feeling of being intellectual pioneers; the campus violence of the late 1960s and early 1970s ensured the breakdown of this relationship of cordial competition, and as a result, student politics in 1985 was dictated far more directly by events in the wider political arena. In this context, it should be observed that student politics during the two uprisings was not purely the product of the clash between Islamism and Communism. Other ideologies emanating from the Middle East, such as Nasserism and, later, Ba'athism, in addition to the notion of 'Third World' neutralism, had their influence. Within the 'other' universities of Khartoum such as the Technical Institute, Omdurman Islamic University and University of Cairo Khartoum Branch, affiliates of the 'traditional' and 'sectarian' parties played a major role in the student unions that mobilized against the regime.

While the students may have acted as instigators, it was the professional associations that provided the leadership for the two uprisings. Their role was comparatively more significant than that of the labour unions. This illustrated the fact that even military rulers could be held hostage by those with ties to the large and inter-connected group of families that constituted the Khartoum elite. While the organized labour possibly challenged the November and May Regimes with more vigour throughout the period

of military rule, it was the professionals who possessed the real capacity to make or break regimes. While the regime could either crush or manipulate workers' unions as a response to dissent, it was harder to pursue such a policy among professional groups, which possessed much more integral links to both the wider Sudanese educated elite and to each other. It was these same links, and the shared professional ethos that bound the doctors, lawyers, civil servants, engineers and university lecturers together, that enabled them to monopolize the leadership of the uprising.

Although the professionals are often seen as representatives of a secular or civil form of politics, advocates of political Islam played just as significant a role in mobilizing the professional unions against the military regime as did their secular or communist colleagues. It must be remembered that Hasan al-Turabi, the most significant figure in the history of Sudanese political Islam, played a hugely significant part in the October Revolution not just as a politician but also as a university lecturer. While the Bar Association leaned towards the left, the very fact that its activists were bound by professional and social camaraderie as much as by party identification ensured that individuals of various political leanings, including the Islamist Mirghani al-Nasri, played a significant role. In 1985 there were fewer 'party' figures in the professional unions, but there were still a number of individuals who were either former members of the Muslim Brotherhood or espoused some form of Islamism – such as Umar Abd al-Ati, Jizouli Dafa'allah and Mirghani al-Nasri. It is fair to say that in both 1964 and 1985, common social bonds and a sense of professionalism prevented ideological cleavages within the professional bodies from hampering their unity in the struggle against the regime – although, as will be demonstrated in later chapters, this happy situation did not persist after the *Intifada*.

In spite of the power they wielded, during both uprisings the professional unions reacted to a political situation that had already developed, mainly as a result of student activism. Even in 1985, when the professional unions had already become heavily involved in the fight against the regime in the years preceding the *Intifada*, their response to it was unplanned and frenetic. Thus, in spite of the enormous influence they wielded and the importance of their role in leading the anti-regime movement, it cannot be said that they conceived or originated the *Intifada*.

## The Armed Forces: Protectors of the People?

During the April *Intifada*, jubilant crowds reacted to the army's decision to refrain from suppressing the civil protests by declaring 'one army, one people' (*jayshun wahid, shaabun wahid*) and 'the army are protectors of the people' (*jaysh humat al-sha'ab*). It is true that in Sudan the various security forces have remained socially porous, and it was this relative proximity to the public that helped to define the nature of their participation in the two uprisings. However, these enthusiastic chants masked a somewhat more complex state of civil-military relations in Sudan. Commentators on the wider Middle East have observed that in specific regimes, either the military establishment dominates the civilian elite, as in Syria, or the civilians successfully politicize and ideologize the military, as was the case in Ba'athist Iraq.<sup>1</sup> These judgements are easy to make because these regimes remained stable for long periods. However in Sudan, it has proved impossible – at least up until Umar al-Bashir's coup of 1989 – for any one civilian or army faction to dominate a military regime because there have been a considerable number of shifts in the balance of power – in 1964, 1969, 1971, 1977 and 1985. In this regard, Sudan's experience is much closer to that of a number of African states, such as Ghana or Nigeria, which have experienced numerous coups, counter-coups and often short-lived returns to democracy.<sup>2</sup> Thus, from the 1950s to the 1980s, the various branches of the Sudanese security forces acted as arenas of competition in which a number of political factions vied for influence.

It is often remarked by analysts of military authoritarianism in the Middle East that even where regimes are totally lacking in legitimacy, they tend to maintain control where their security apparatus – including the army, police and intelligence services – remains united and efficient.<sup>3</sup> Hence, understanding the divisions between these various factions within the military, in addition to the divisions between the army, intelligence services and police, is crucial to understanding why the two uprisings were able to take the course that they did. At the same time, the fact that none of the major political factions within Sudan were able to fully dominate the military had ensured that the upper echelons of the officers corps could still pursue institutional and non-ideological agendas, and this lingering sense of professionalism explains why the army – like the police – had often been unwilling to act as the coercive arm of the government.<sup>4</sup> Narratives on the first of the two uprisings tend to highlight the clash between the radicalized junior ranks and the military leadership, which represented the regime. Here we will also focus on the role of a middle category of officers, who to some extent represented the 'official mind' of the military.



## The tribulations of the Sudanese police force in 1964

We shall discuss first the role played by the police in the October Revolution, for it was their inability to contain the civil dissent that brought the army into play. The role of the police during the Revolution highlighted two important themes: first, the manner in which police violence was as indicative of weakness and the ineffectiveness of the force's methods of control as it was of a deliberate brutality; and secondly, the manner in which the social porosity of the Sudanese security forces imposed limitations on the state's capacity to use them as agents of coercion.

As we have seen, it was a series of clashes between police and students at the University of Khartoum, culminating in the shooting of Ahmad al-Qurayshi, that led to the outbreak of the Revolution. While the University Incident and its aftermath demonstrated the potential for police violence, it also showed the limitations of the use of the contemporary police as a tool against opposition elements. 'Abd al-Wahhab Ibrahim, a serving officer at the time, argues that the police made a mistake in actually entering the university campus as this inevitably led to them being surrounded by students and then forced to open fire. He claims that the police leadership was divided over whether to enter the university or wait outside and disperse the students if they chose to demonstrate on the streets.<sup>5</sup> The tear gas that they used simply did not work. Henderson states that most of it 'blew back or was thrown back in their faces'.<sup>6</sup> Witnesses recalled that the students retreated to the dormitories and waited for the police to run out of tear gas bombs, and then attacked again.<sup>7</sup>

Moreover, the reaction of the urban public to these incidents demonstrated that the police were at this time emancipated neither from society nor from the rule of law. The doctors stated that the wounds they had seen inflicted by the police on the students were as if they had been struck 'in a battle between noble Muslims and Jews callous of heart',<sup>8</sup> and they refused to treat injured policemen who were instead sent to military wards.<sup>9</sup> It is likely that at a time when urban Sudanese society was still relatively close knit, this public and religiously tinged stigmatization would have significantly demoralized the police force, which was at this time largely composed of recruits drawn from the same riverain backgrounds as the student protesters.<sup>10</sup> Even more importantly, the judges stated that al-Qurayshi's shooting should be treated as a case of intentional homicide.<sup>11</sup>

The immediate effect of this moral and legal condemnation of the police by the professional groups and the media was that large sections of the force started to refuse to obey orders to open fire on the public. The force became particularly resentful of the regime's commands after the Ministry of Interior issued a statement blaming the police themselves for opening fire on the students, and insisting that no orders had been issued sanctioning this. Thus a number of policemen, realizing that they would not be supported by the government and would perhaps be liable to prosecution if they were to repeat their use of force, began to refuse to act against demonstrations, and even joined the crowds instead.<sup>12</sup> The police also adopted non-confrontational behaviour in towns such as Port Sudan and Dueim, as the civil unrest spread to the provinces.<sup>13</sup> They showed their deference to the judiciary by agreeing to disperse when commanded to do so by 'Abd al-Majid Imam, who led the judges' and lawyers'

demonstration.<sup>14</sup> This incident indicated that the officers of the Khartoum Police Force were still sufficiently attached to professional ideals that they could identify with the 'Professional Front'; in many ways, police inactivity during the Revolution was also a product of the shared ethos that bound this movement together.

Senior police officers, like the leading professionals, also hailed from the same socially networked educated elite that dominated political and professional life at the time. The policeman leading the force charged with apprehending the judges' demonstration, al-Qurayshi Faris, would later explain his decision to refrain from the use of force against it with reference to his close connections to political society in Khartoum. Recalling the incident 21 years later, Faris observed that he had shared many communist friends as a school pupil, and that he would frequently call on Hasan al-Turabi to seek his advice in interpreting the law, just as he would attend Sadiq al-Mahdi's mosque in Omdurman to perform the sunset prayer and visit Isma'il al-Azhari to lend him policemen as guards.<sup>15</sup> Mallasi claims that another reason al-Faris proved so malleable was that, while he himself was apolitical, his brother was among the members of the KUSU executive committee who were at the time interned in Kober.<sup>16</sup> He also observes that while he and other senior lawmen were organizing the lawyers' and judges' demonstrations, Lewis Sidra, the Commandant of the Khartoum force, chose to ignore their violations of curfew because Mallasi's father had been a close friend of his in the College of Administration and Police.<sup>17</sup>

The active nature of the force's participation in the Revolution could have been exaggerated. While policemen and those nostalgic about the Revolution often recall how members of the force 'joined the people', the extent to which this actually happened is by no means clear. K. D. D. Henderson, a European witness, implies that they were simply overwhelmed by the situation. He states that on Friday 23 October 'the police were thoroughly demoralized and stood by helplessly' as demonstrators hijacked their broadcasting apparatus, sabotaged their vehicles and committed various acts of vandalism.<sup>18</sup> Ageing Khartoumers recall that those policemen who joined in the demonstrations did so in plain-clothes, leaving their uniforms at home.<sup>19</sup> This would seem to indicate that their involvement was as individual citizens rather than as policemen. Meanwhile, some policemen continued to support the army in clashing with demonstrators and killed three more of the latter on the evening of 25 October.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, it is clear that large sections of the force refrained from further action against demonstrators for fear of legal and public reprisals. Thus, the events that followed the University Incident epitomized the dilemma of the Sudanese policemen, who were socially stigmatized and caught between competing pressures exercised by different factions within the state – in this case, an intransigent military government and an independent judiciary.

## Reassessing the role of the Free Officers in 1964

Just as the social proximity of the police to the demonstrating public prevented the force from enacting severer reprisals against the civil protests, it also influenced junior officers within the military who made it clear to their superiors at critical stages of

the Revolution that they would not open fire on the public. Commentators on the Revolution have often pointed to the fact that a majority of the soldiers in Khartoum at the time, like a good number of the inhabitants of the capital itself, hailed from the Shayqiyya ethnic group.<sup>21</sup> However, there was also a far more political background to the dissent within the military. Even though the junta's emergence in 1958 gave the army a privileged position in Sudanese society, the regime's lack of any identifiable ideology left the junior radicals in the army just as frustrated as the students and young professionals.

Accounts of the October Revolution usually highlight the role of the Free Officer movement, a clandestine political organization within the military inspired by Gamal Nasser's movement of the same name in Egypt. The participation of the Free Officers in 1964 has been closely assessed because of this group's involvement in the coup that brought about the May Regime in 1969. They represented a far more radical break with the colonial past than the military cabal that had managed the 1958 takeover. Jafa'ar Nimeiri, who would become the leader of the Free Officers' Revolutionary Command Council in 1969, was the son of a postman. Like his left-wing co-conspirator Babikir al-Nur, he was educated in one of the *Ahliyya* schools established by nationalists in the colonial period to combat the British tactic of keeping education restricted to the elite.<sup>22</sup> In contrast, Abboud's junta seemed to embody the system established by the British. Most of them had been educated at the elite colonial school, Gordon College, and had received medals for fighting against the Italians in Libya and Eritrea on behalf of the British Empire in the Second World War. The father of Hasan Bashir Nasr, Abboud's deputy commander-in-chief and minister of defence, had presided over the Shayqiyya *Umudiyya* at Halfaya al-Muluk in the colonial Native Administration – as such, he was identified with the nobility of Sudan that had allied itself to the British during the Condominium period.<sup>23</sup>

In this sense, we might read the Free Officers' contribution to the October Revolution as an extension of the struggle for national independence, and see them as the vanguard agents of a moment of national catharsis in which the privileged social order established by the colonizers was swept away and a newly emancipated social order introduced. There are, of course, telling limitations to this line of analysis. While the majority of the Free Officers hailed from social backgrounds that were, in contrast to those of the existing military elite, humble, they only represented Sudan's immediate social periphery. For the most part, they hailed from the same central riverain regions as the existing military and governmental elite that had emerged during the colonial period, spoke the same languages and represented the same ethnic groups. The Free Officer movement was defined by the same limitations as those of the October Revolution itself – attachment to a narrowly defined vision of the Sudanese nation.

Moreover, in 1964 the Free Officers still represented a relatively minor organization in comparison with what they would later become. The initial movement had come into existence soon after the coup launched in Cairo in 1952 by the Egyptian Free Officers, after whom the Sudanese organization was named. Its members were broadly inspired by Nasser's Arab nationalism, although it did include some left-wing elements.<sup>24</sup> However, this nascent movement was effectively liquidated in 1959 by Abboud, who



took severe measures against its members following their participation in Ali Hamid's abortive coup of that year.<sup>25</sup> When a second movement arose in the early 1960s, the SCP exercised a more significant influence in it, but not a dominant one.<sup>26</sup> Hashim al-Atta, who would lead the pro-communist coup attempt of 1971, was not a member of the movement at the time although his colleague Babikir al-Nur, who would also be executed for his role in the abortive 1971 takeover, was.<sup>27</sup> Al-Nur was the SCP's link to the Free Officer organization at the time, and according to Mahgub Bireir, he and Abd al-Khaliq Mahgub had already made plans that it should await a popular uprising and then use its influence among the officer corps to prevent the army from crushing it.<sup>28</sup> In 1961, the SCP-linked officers, whose affiliations were not necessarily known to their fellow collaborators at the time, used the party's printing press to establish an underground media organ entitled *Sawt al-Quwwat al-Musallaha*. Editions of this secret newspaper declared that the Free Officers would be 'working with the popular movement to ensure the regime's overthrow'.<sup>29</sup> However, Babikir al-Nur was not the dominant figure in the movement at the time. The organization was informally headed by Faruq Hamdallah, who defined the movement as a 'progressive nationalist' organization and believed that its role should be to initiate a coup, which the political parties would then join.<sup>30</sup>

In spite of the fact that the Free Officer movement was still in the process of formation in 1964, since 1969 a narrative has developed within both Western academic and Sudanese media circles that attributes to it a central role in the Revolution. Niblock, for instance, states that on the evening of 25 October, 'Free Officer elements within the army brought in troops to surround the republican palace, impressing on the members of the SCAF (who were meeting within) the weakness of their position. By the morning of 27 October, the SCAF had dissolved itself...'<sup>31</sup> Daly also asserts that it was 'plots by junior officers to stage a coup against the army leadership' that 'convinced Abboud that there was no alternative to the resignation of the government'.<sup>32</sup> Ahmad Sulayman, writing in one of Nimeiri's media organs during the former Free Officer's period as president, claimed that the Free Officers had surrounded the palace and demanded that Abboud dissolve the SCAF, cabinet and central council, making 25 October the 'decisive day'.<sup>33</sup> Specifically, Colonel Muhammad al-Baghir Ahmad – who would later serve as one of Nimeiri's vice-presidents – is referred to as the man who on 26 October led pro-Free Officer regiments towards the palace and carried a memorandum to Abboud demanding that he resign.<sup>34</sup> As seen in Chapter 2, even as the regime brought about by the movement in 1969 was being overthrown by the next civilian uprising, the last remaining Free Officer endeavoured desperately to win over the protesting crowds by observing that they were the makers of the October Revolution.<sup>35</sup> Thus, in spite of being accepted to a degree by academic commentators, this narrative was very much intertwined with the propaganda of the May Regime.

After Nimeiri's downfall in 1985, a counter-narrative emerged that challenged various aspects of this account. Six months after the May Regime had been overthrown, Abd al-Rahman Nur Idris wrote an article in *al-Sahafa* criticizing what he saw as an attempt to distort the history of the October Revolution. He alleged that the man who took his detachment to the palace and forced Abboud to dissolve the SCAF was not al-Baghir Ahmad but Mahjub Bireir, who was at that time a *Yuzbashi* in the armoured



corps. Idris also claimed that it was Bireir who played the decisive role in persuading members of the armoured corps not to open fire on the crowds if ordered to do so.<sup>36</sup>

It is important to focus on the background of Mahjub Bireir, not just because his role at the palace was so central, but also because he has written the most substantial account that the author is aware of on the role of the army during the October Revolution. Bireir attracted a great deal of attention in the Sudanese media in 1985 as a former Free Officer who had opposed the movement's involvement in the 1969 coup, and gave evidence at the trial of those who had participated in it. In spite of having been affiliated with the organization, he eventually clashed with Nimeiri's regime, and would claim that he participated in two attempted coups against it, one of which nearly led to his execution.<sup>37</sup> He therefore constitutes something of an 'unsympathetic insider' in the Free Officer Organization. He enjoyed the confidence of both leading Free Officers, such as Faruq Hamdallah, and senior members of the military regime, such as Hasan Bashir Nasr. It was this double affinity that defined his role, and makes his account particularly revealing.

In spite of the assertions of Abd al-Rahman Nur Idris, Bireir, while acknowledging that he was present at the palace, does not attribute a particularly significant role to himself. However, his account does contradict the classic narrative regarding the part played by the Free Officers in many respects. He recalls that on the morning of 25 October, his garrison leader, Umar Muhammad Ibrahim, dispatched him to guard an important meeting of senior military officers being held at the house of Hasan Bashir Nasr. Umar Muhammad Ibrahim and Hasan Bashir Nasr apparently chose Bireir for this mission because of the trust that accompanied the common upbringing of the three soldiers in Halfaya al-Muluk.<sup>38</sup> This serves as another reminder that while the Free Officers may not have undergone the same colonial education as the previous generation of army officers, they still hailed from the same narrowly defined geographic sectors of Sudanese society.

It seems that in this case, this social and geographic proximity undermined the impact of generational and political differences. Bireir maintains that when he arrived at Hasan Bashir Nasr's house, Nasr informed him that the SCAP had decided to dissolve itself and 'return power to the people', retaining Abboud as president for the purpose of maintaining stability.<sup>39</sup> Bireir's evidence here corresponds with Cliff Thomson's description of the decisions made at the same meeting.<sup>40</sup> This suggests that it was *not* any action taken by the Free Officers later in the day that provoked Abboud's scuttling of the November Regime. In support of this, it is worth remembering that there are many other explanations for Abboud's famous decision – for instance, the story that he wept at the death of al-Qurayshi and upon realizing the extent of his unpopularity, or the account that maintains that he abandoned hope when he realized representatives of the Khatmiyya-backed PDP, who he had believed were his main supporters, had attended the meeting at the Mahdi's tomb.<sup>41</sup>

Bireir also undermines the claim that it was the Free Officers who surrounded the palace on 25 October. He states that although he was a Free Officer at the time, it was not they, but his garrison commander Umar Muhammad Ibrahim who ordered him to take his armoured regiment to the palace, shortly after his meeting with Hasan Bashir Nasr. Bireir claims that when he arrived at the palace, he spoke on the phone to

Abboud, who had been informed that the purpose of Bireir's mission was to guard the palace and not to attack it.<sup>42</sup> However, later that morning, a more antagonistic force *did* emerge under another clandestine Free Officer serving in the armoured corps, Rashid Nur al-Din, who was senior to Bireir in rank. This situation seemed to have created a particularly complex crisis of loyalties for Bireir, involving conflicting allegiances towards his president, garrison commander, senior officer, political organization and village background. Unsurprisingly, he appears to have compromised. He maintains that he informed his comrade that Abboud had resolved to dissolve the SCAF, eliciting a sarcastic response from Nur al-Din, who questioned how exactly he had acquired this information from the president and accused him of defending the military regime. Bireir then allowed him to deploy his infantry around his own tanks and take command of the forces present, telling Abboud at the same time that Nur al-Din had come to support his own troops – which he apparently believed. Faruq Hamdallah then arrived at 7 o'clock and, as his senior officer in the Free Officer Organization, instructed Nur al-Din to depart.<sup>43</sup> Thus the story about Free Officers 'surrounding the palace' appears, at least given Bireir's evidence, more ambiguous than it does in the classic narratives of the Revolution. His account has been upheld by Mahmoud Qalandar's recent history of Abboud and his downfall.<sup>44</sup> It does also to an extent correspond with that of the former Novemberist minister Mamoun Biheiri, who recalls that it was unclear to those within the palace whether the force dispatched there on 25 October was there to protect or to threaten them.<sup>45</sup>

Another problematic aspect of the standard 'Free Officer' narrative is the account that emphasizes the role of Muhammad al-Baghir Ahmad, another secret member of the organization, in delivering Abboud a message on behalf of the army demanding that he relinquish power. First of all, it should be observed that al-Baghir was regarded at the time as a man who was very close to the Free Officer movement, rather than an actual member.<sup>46</sup> Other accounts emphasize that it was Muhammad Idris Abdullah, the head of the infantry school, as well as the director of military intelligence al-Tayyib al-Mardi who alongside al-Baghir informed Abboud that he should surrender power to prevent bloodshed, and threatened to bring in troops from Omdurman to coerce Abboud.<sup>47</sup> Qalandar suggests that the former, as head of military intelligence, made a particular impact on Abboud by conveying to him the extent of discontent within the army.<sup>48</sup> Al-Tayyib al-Mardi himself was a member of the Free Officer movement in 1964, although Muhammad Idris Abdullah apparently possessed no links to it.<sup>49</sup>

Bireir's version of this story downplays the significance of the clandestine political movement in the junior ranks. He claims that Muhammad al-Baghir delivered his message not on account of the Free Officers but on behalf of senior members of the army leadership including Hasan Bashir Nasr and middle rankers such as Muhammad Idris Abdullah. This is supported by Qalandar, who suggests that Hamad al-Nil Daifallah, Muhammad Idris Abdullah and Muzammil Sulayman Ghandur all participated in writing it.<sup>50</sup> Moreover, Bireir recalls that at the same time that al-Baghir delivered his message, Yusuf al-Jak Taha, another senior member of the Engineers' Corps, dispatched a force under Yusuf al-Haj to the palace to accompany him.<sup>51</sup> Muzammil Sulayman Ghandur, another middle-ranking officer who later joined the May Regime, also seems to argue that al-Baghir was co-ordinating closely with the other middle-ranking officers

rather than the Free Officer movement at this time, claiming that the two of them along with Muhammad Idris Abdullah and al-Tāyib al-Mardi proposed to Hasan Bashir Nasr that he take over from Abboud.<sup>52</sup> He maintains that Hasan Bashir Nasr had no interest in the presidency, and actively supported the ultimatum that al-Baghir delivered, saying 'well done, well done' to him as he handed it over to Abboud.<sup>53</sup> Thus it seems that it was the middle-ranking officers and army leadership that most directly influenced the crucial decisions being made in the palace on 25 and 26 October.

Bireir even asserts that leading Free Officers were surprised by the Revolution. He states that on 15 October, he lunched with Faruq Hamdallah who had invited him to join in a coup that would occur on 25 October. This proposed coup would usher in a transitional government jointly led by the Free Officers and political parties, which would after a short period surrender power to the people.<sup>54</sup> Bireir states that when the demonstration in Khartoum broke out a week later, he asked him about his coup plans, and Hamdallah observed that 'the popular revolution has aborted them'.<sup>55</sup> Hamdallah then observed that the policy of the Free Officers towards the revolution must be to 'support it so that it achieves its purpose without revealing our own identity and objectives!'<sup>56</sup> This indicates that while the Free Officers may have helped facilitate the Revolution, they did not initiate it.

The movement's most critical contribution towards the success of the civil protests was the part it played in encouraging army regiments to refuse orders to open fire on the demonstrating public. As soon as the protests first broke out on 22 October, Faruq Hamdallah was ordered to move a force from the armoured corps to close the Blue Nile Bridge. He refused to carry out this order, informing his superior that it would lead to clashes with civilians and inevitable casualties. Discontent quickly spread throughout the armoured corps, where the movement was most strongly rooted.<sup>57</sup> Bireir admits that one of the reasons that so many NCOs sided with the demonstrators during the uprising was that in the period immediately before the Revolution, the organization had decided to incorporate NCOs into its ranks, as a result of advice by Abd al-Khaliq Mahgub to Babikir al-Nur, the SCP's man in the Free Officer movement.<sup>58</sup> He attributes the fact that so many NCOs sided with the demonstrators during the uprising to this decision.<sup>59</sup> The Arab nationalists within the civilian movement also appear to have been confident that their allies within the Free Officer Organization had enough influence within the military to be able to stymie any efforts by the senior officers to use the army to coerce the public. Mallasi recalls that, although the government sent a squadron under Muzammil Ghandur to disperse the lawyers' and judges' demonstration of 24 October, he was always confident that the force would relent as it eventually did because of an 'agreement' he had made with Colonel Hussein Bayumi.<sup>60</sup> Ahmad Ali Baggadi, who had been observing the Revolution since its very outbreak, argues that the Free Officers were very influential in that they 'refused order to shoot citizens', although their role was limited by the fact that they 'were not very organized at that time'.<sup>61</sup> In other words, the Free Officers appear to have scored their main successes in supporting the Revolution from the bottom up.

Nevertheless, according to Mallasi, before al-Baghir's intervention on 26 October, the Free Officers did briefly plan launching a coup after having become frustrated at the slow pace of the negotiations that were being conducted by the parties and the



professionals.<sup>62</sup> It seems that they abandoned this after Muhammad Abd al-Halim, the officer whom they had entrusted to communicate the news to the Professional Front, betrayed them and revealed their plans to Awad al-Soghayrun of the army command. However, according to Mallasi, al-Soghayrun simply condemned Muhammad Abd al-Halim and threatened to shoot him if he betrayed his comrades again.<sup>63</sup> However, even if we accept the veracity of this account, it is unlikely that this coup plot would have inspired the decision of the military command that the SCAF should be dissolved – the incident would have happened either late on 25 October, or early on 26 October, and the decision had already been made at this stage. However, it might conceivably have given the senior military commanders a further incentive to pre-empt the young radicals.

Mallasi insists that after the coup plans were leaked, the movement broadly supported the Professional Front stance that Abboud should dissolve the SCAF and stay on as president until elections could be held.<sup>64</sup> In general, however, the Free Officers do not seem to have been able to influence major decisions. Recalling the negotiating team's decision to appoint Sirr al-Khatim al-Khalifa as interim prime minister, Khalid Hasan Abbas states 'we didn't want it, but we agreed to it'.<sup>65</sup> Nor does it seem that the junior officers were willing to sanction radical action against the old regime at this time. Zein al-Abdin Abd al-Qadir, the officer whose unit opened fire on the crowds to prevent them from reaching the palace on 28 October, was close to the organization at the time and would join it soon after the Revolution.<sup>66</sup> However, the fact that he did not prevent his unit from opening fire on the crowds surging towards the palace demonstrated that junior officers were not willing to preside over a radical revolution.

The flaw in the standard Free Officer narrative on the October Revolution is that it assumes that just because men were members of the movement, or in contact with it, they devoted themselves exclusively to its objectives. In practice, men such as Bireir, al-Baghir Muhammad Ahmad and al-Tayyib al-Mardi, in their actions throughout the Revolution, balanced their loyalty to the organization against their loyalty to the military command, and acted in coordination with their seniors and the middle-ranking officers just as much as they did with the junior ranks.

### The middle-ranking and senior officers as negotiators in the Revolution

Focusing too exclusively on the part of the Free Officers within the junior ranks risks neglecting the agency exercised by the more senior echelons of the army leadership. The more senior officers did not simply respond to the actions of the young radicals, but rather immersed themselves in their own power struggles and pursued a complex variety of agendas. In particular, it is worth situating the crisis of the November Regime within the context of the breakdown of relations among members of the SCAF. It is worth noting that in the years preceding the Revolution, the British Ambassador had argued that the regime was stable because the ruling generals got on so well.

The military junta was both politically and socially homogeneous in its composition. The generals all hailed from the riverain regions of northern Sudan and had all benefited from elite colonial educations. Moreover, after the retirement of the SCAF's one Umma sympathizer, Abd al-Wahhab, in 1959, the ruling body was dominated by men who hailed from Khatmiyya backgrounds – such as Abboud, Hasan Bashir Nasr and the minister of interior, Muhammad Irwa.<sup>67</sup> However, the complex political situation that preceded the October Revolution seems to have provoked frictions among senior regime members. The nephew of Muhammad Irwa, Abboud's minister of interior, insists that there were severe tensions within the SCAF at the time of the Revolution and that his uncle fell out with his colleagues in the military regime as a result of the memorandum that had been presented to him by KUSU. He states that, after having detained the KUSU executive committee, his relative retired from the SCAF in protest against its refusal to consider the memorandum and its insistence that he arrest the students.<sup>68</sup>

If we accept that the SCAF had been wracked by internal conflict in the days leading up to the Revolution, it might explain why Abboud, Hasan Bashir Nasr and the rest of the army leadership were so keen to dissolve it at the time. Bireir argues that Nasr saw an opportunity to present himself as the man who shepherded the country towards civilian rule and thus guarantee himself a position as commander-in-chief under the next regime. Sadiq al-Mahdi maintains that Nasr approached him personally even before Abboud did, sending his brother Taha Bashir to propose a bilateral agreement with the Umma Party.<sup>69</sup> This story would seem to indicate that Nasr was seeking to forge positive relations with a set of relatively conservative civilian rulers so that he could maintain his military position. As seen above, this strategy led him to coordinate with a number of middle-ranking officers to arrange the memorandum that al-Baghir delivered to Abboud. This ploy might also be seen as a product of divisions within the SCAF, as Nasr had begun to vie with another member of the junta for the position of commander-in-chief.<sup>70</sup> However, Nasr's designs were thwarted when the middle-ranking officers, led by al-Tahir al-Maqbul, confronted him and declared that they would not accept him or any other member of the former regime as their leader.<sup>71</sup>

The moves against the SCAF, and then against Nasr, demonstrated the significance of the group of middle-ranking officers who were not members of the SCAF, and yet remained senior to the young radicals who dominated the Free Officer movement. The most important men within this cohort were Major-General al-Tahir Maqbul, Brigadier Yusuf al-Jak Taha, Colonel Muhammad al-Baghir Ahmad, General Awad al-Soghayrun, Muzammil Ghandur, Brigadier Umar al-Hag Musa and Muhammad Idris Abdullah. The role that this batch of men was playing was barely concealed from the public; one journalist recalls witnessing Muzammil Ghandur standing near Abboud and making physical gestures to indicate 'it's all over' as Abboud made his 26 October speech on dissolving the SCAF.<sup>72</sup>

It was this group that dominated the negotiations over the return to civilian rule and developed links with the various competing factions that included the Professional Front, the political parties and the Free Officer movement. While it was these men that helped forge the compromises that made a peaceful transition possible, they themselves possessed a series of separate and often conflicting agendas.

Their social and institutional backgrounds were more similar to those of the military Novemberists than the young radicals of the Free Officer movement: Umar al-Haj Musa had graduated from Gordon College, the elite school of the Anglo-Egyptian condominium, and was the son of *al-Qa'imaqam* al-Haj Bey Musa, a senior officer in the colonial army; Awad al-Soghayrun, another Gordon College graduate, had served in the Libyan and Eritrean campaigns with the British during the Second World War; and the father of Muhammad Idris Abdullah had studied at Egypt's al-Azhar University and served under the Mahdist *amir* of Darfur.<sup>73</sup> Awad al-Soghayrun had even served on the SCAF when it was initially formed in 1958, before returning to regular military service in 1959. While some sympathized with the radical ideals of the Free Officers, others identified more closely with the old guard; some were close to the parties, others to the professionals.

These officers did not simply react to the initiatives of the junior radicals. As early as the evening of 22 October, Muzammil Sulayman Ghandur and Muhammad al-Baghir Ahmad shared dinner with a number of other middle rankers and discussed the fact that 'the time had arrived for a great change', suggesting that they should intervene 'to prevent a war between the government and the people'.<sup>74</sup> They first began to enter into communications with the younger officers on the night of 23 October.<sup>75</sup> Qalandar suggests that a meeting between Umar al-Haj Musa, Sharif al-Habib and the younger officers of the armoured corps (in which the Free Officers were heavily represented) was critical in enabling the middle and lower ranks to forge a common position.<sup>76</sup> However, they also elected to approach the established political parties from the previous parliamentary era. On 27 October, al-Tahir Maqbul and Awad al-Soghayrun – both of whom had attended the meeting at Hasan Bashir Nasr's house on 25 October that decreed the dissolution of the SCAF – visited representatives of the political parties that were gathering at the *gubba*, ostensibly to negotiate on behalf of Abboud. Both these officers were Umma Party sympathizers hailing from *Ansari* backgrounds.<sup>77</sup> Al-Tahir Maqbul was a major player – it was he who later informed Hasan Bashir Nasr that the army would not accept his leadership, and persuaded Abboud and the rest of the army leadership to place former SCAF members under house arrest.<sup>78</sup>

The fact that two Umma sympathizers acted as Abboud's representatives in these negotiations underlines the fact that factions within the army were hoping to bypass the 'modern forces', within both the army and the professional unions, by approaching the more socially conservative political parties – although when they visited the *gubba*, they were not aware of the fact that the parties had already agreed with the professionals to establish the United National Front.<sup>79</sup> It is noticeable that two other prominent members of this cohort of middle-ranking officers – Umar al-Haj Musa and Muhammad Idris Abdullah – came from families traditionally affiliated with the Umma.<sup>80</sup> The likely explanation for this was that the Umma Party had been sidelined within the regime since the radicals Muhieddin and Shennan had forced Abboud to sanction a vote by officers on the membership of the SCAF, which resulted in the expulsion of the three Umma-affiliated generals – Hussein Karrar, Ahmad Abd al-Wahhab and al-Soghayrun himself.<sup>81</sup> These marginalized officers were thus well placed to take on an influential role after the downfall of the mainly Khatmi SCAF.



This, in turn, may help explain why the Umma Party was so influential during the transitional period and parliamentary era.<sup>82</sup>

Other middle rankers were more hostile to the political parties. At the same time as al-Tahir al-Maqbul and Awad al-Soghayrun visited the *Gubba*, Muzammil Ghandur approached members of the Professional Front as they were gathering on 27 October at Ahmad Al-Amin Abd al-Rahman's house in Omdurman and offered to cut a deal whereby the professionals and the army would share power and thereby close out the political parties.<sup>83</sup> This offer appears to have been swiftly rejected, and it is unclear how much support Ghandur had – very little, according to Jafa'ar Karrar.<sup>84</sup> It appears that Ghandur was being nominated at this time by a number of senior and middle-ranking officers as a potential candidate for the post of commander-in-chief and maybe even that of transitional prime minister, but that he lost support when the middle-ranking officers began to believe he was too close to Hasan Bashir Nasr.<sup>85</sup> His failure indicates that the professionals were not at this stage wary enough of the more conservative political parties to be prepared to forge alliances with elements in the army sympathetic to the 'modern forces'.

In spite of their differences, with men such as Hasan Bashir Nasr discredited, it was this middle-ranking faction that negotiated with the United National Front to determine the process of transition in Sudan. Indeed, Abu Eissa contends that it was this group of officers that played the greatest role in insisting that the parties and professionals merge into a common front in the first place.<sup>86</sup> The officers who attended the meetings at the palace with the United National Front were al-Tahir Maqbul, Awad al-Soghayrun, Muhammad Idris Abdullah, Muhammad al-Baghir Ahmad, Yusuf al-Jak Taha and, possibly, Muzammil Ghandur.<sup>87</sup> As seen above, two of them had played a major role in suggesting to Abboud the manner in which he should dissolve the SCAF. It appears that the demands of these officers at the negotiations were focused mainly on 'preserving stability' within the armed forces at a time when it was fighting against the rebel movement in the south, and particularly on preserving Abboud as commander-in-chief.<sup>88</sup> Their positions thus represented the institutional interests of the military, and were far more conservative than those of the Free Officer movement.

One reason the army negotiators remained focused on the institutional interests of the military was that this batch of senior and middle-ranking officers did not possess a uniform set of attitudes. Awad al-Soghayrun was among the most senior and most conservative, frequently making objections during the transitional negotiations to nominees affiliated to either the SCP or Muslim Brotherhood.<sup>89</sup> It was also he who had had Jafa'ar Nimeiri, one of the firebrands of the Free Officer movement, placed under arrest soon after the demonstrations broke out.<sup>90</sup> However, others were more sympathetic, particularly Muhammad al-Baghir Ahmad and Umar al-Haj Musa, the latter of whom consciously overlooked the secret production of pamphlets by Free Officers within the Signallers' Corps.<sup>91</sup> These officers acted as a bridge between the Free Officers and the army leadership that could allow a compromise to be reached.<sup>92</sup> Indeed, it was Umar al-Haj Musa who persuaded the UNF to insert a clause within the transitional constitution debarring former regime members from trial for the political acts for which they had been responsible during the November Regime.<sup>93</sup> In the transitional period, it would be another pair of senior officers, Baqar Abu Bakr

and Muhammad Idris Abdullah, who would collaborate with the Professional Front to arrest members of the SCAF after they moved against the Free Officers.<sup>94</sup>

It was this cohort of men who would dominate the senior echelons of the military in the parliamentary years. They ensured that Khawwad Muhammad Ahmad, another of the Gordon College generation who had initially served in the November Regime but had also been removed in 1959, was installed as commander-in-chief.<sup>95</sup> Umar al-Hag Musa became director of the armed forces administration, and Muhammad Idris Abdullah, chief of the general staff.<sup>96</sup> The new commanders' attitudes towards the Free Officer movement continued to waver between apprehension and sympathy; initially, the new army command attempted to weaken the movement by dispatching the most influential Free Officers to garrisons located well away from the capital.<sup>97</sup> However, Umar al-Hag Musa ensured that this policy was reversed and later managed to prevent a number of the same men from being prosecuted for their involvement in Khalid al-Kidd's attempted coup of 1967.<sup>98</sup> The contrasting approaches of these men dictated their fortunes when the Free Officers came into power in 1969; while men like Muhammad Idris Abdullah and Khawwad were pensioned off, Umar al-Haj Musa, al-Tayyib al-Mardi and al-Baghir Muhammad Ahmad all acquired senior positions within the new regime.

To emphasize the importance of these men is not to argue that they created the October Revolution, but to contend that – as was the case in the Libyan, Tunisian, Syrian and Egyptian uprisings in 2011 – the reaction of senior officers within the military was critical to determining whether the anti-regime protests would lead to a peaceful transition to democracy or a more violent suppression of the protests. It was these men that smoothened the passage from the rule of the older generation of soldiers who had inherited the ideals of British militarism to that of the younger radicals imbued with socialist and Arab nationalist philosophies. They facilitated the transition to civilian rule, and yet simultaneously managed to deradicalize the revolution.

## The army under Nimeiri and the growth of parallel security organs

In 1964, the military response to the civilian uprising was governed by power struggles within the army; in 1985, it was dictated by conflict not just within the army but also within the 'security forces' at large. An important distinction that can be made between the role of the army and the police in 1964 and in 1985 is that by the time of the latter uprising, Nimeiri had marginalized both of these bodies in favour of his own State Security Organization. The establishment of this body, which merged Nimeiri's previous National Security Organization (NSO) with the intelligence branch of the police, the Public Security Organization (PSO), was the hallmark of a process whereby the president was able to shed his dependence on the police and more directly militarize the security services. One of Sudan's leading generals, the vice-president Umar al-Tayyib, was appointed head of the new security organ. This precipitated a rapid decline in police–military relations. In 1979, Nimeiri established a new pay scale (*taqwim wazifi*)

that effectively placed police officers one pay grade below their counterparts in the army and SSO, making the rank of an 'Amid (brigadier) of the police equivalent to an 'Aqid (colonel) in the army. This led to great disappointment among police officers, and the Supreme Leadership (*al-qiyyadat al-'ulya*) of the police and prison service sent a memorandum of protest to the minister of the interior,<sup>99</sup> who at this time was Abd al-Wahhab Ibrahim, a former head of the then dissolved PSO. The result was a dispute between Ibrahim and Nimeiri, which concluded with the dismissal of the former and the dissolution of the ministry of interior.<sup>100</sup> At the same time, Nimeiri used his presidential authority to emasculate the police leadership, transferring authority over the various branches of the police force to regional governors appointed directly by himself, in addition to a variety of government departments.<sup>101</sup> The president was thus able to slowly marginalize the police in favour of the SSO.

Initially, it was only the police force that was marginalized by the establishment of the SSO. Nimeiri seems to have hoped that by appointing Umar al-Tayyib head of the SSO, he would be able to forge relatively close links between security, the regime and the army, since Umar al-Tayyib was a former soldier and had been a long-term friend of the army chief-of-staff Abd al-Majid Hamid Khalil.<sup>102</sup> Nevertheless, in spite of subsidizing the provision of freezers and televisions for members of the armed forces,<sup>103</sup> he was unable to shelter the army from the widespread economic turmoil the corruption and misguided policies of his regime had brought about. While the relatively privileged army salaries enriched the soldiers themselves, the opposition media outside Sudan was able to observe that these same men were forced to support large families that did not share the same benefits, and suffered greatly as a result of the country's economic stagnation.<sup>104</sup> This was far from being simply opposition propaganda. In October 1980, the British Defence attaché winked at rumours of military discontent, noting 'Money is the root of the problem both for the officers and the other ranks and in this respect SPAF [the Sudan People's Armed Forces] are in no way protected from the effects of inflation (currently running at 30 per cent) by special shops or subsidies.'<sup>105</sup> One senior officer now acknowledges that throughout the early 1980s, military intelligence was publishing daily reports on 'general opinions within the military' (*al-ra'i al-aam al-askari*) that pointed to a 'state of severe agitation' within the military.<sup>106</sup>

The Khartoum bread riots of January 1982, during which soldiers were called in to assist in the suppression of student demonstrations, brought Nimeiri's relationship with his top generals to its lowest ebb. On 12 January, the chief-of-staff Abd al-Majid Hamid Khalil, who was also Nimeiri's vice-president, began to attack the regime openly in SSU meetings, condemning its corruption, the brutality with which it had suppressed the recent demonstrations, and its imposition of austerity and privatization measures decreed by the IMF.<sup>107</sup> This was followed up by another meeting between Nimeiri and the entire military leadership, including Abd al-Majid Hamid Khalil, in which the leading soldiers openly attacked the corrupt activities of senior figures such as Bahieddin Idris and Nimeiri's brother Mustafa, and objected to the harsh measures taken against rioters and western Sudanese migrants to Khartoum.<sup>108</sup> The president responded to this challenge by dismissing the entire army leadership, and emasculating the army commanders he replaced them with by cancelling the position of chief of staff and diminishing the authority of the deputy chiefs of staff.<sup>109</sup> Although it cost Khalil



and his companions their jobs, the challenge to Nimeiri does not appear to have been made on any ideological grounds. A British embassy profile of Khalil composed in 1980 claimed that he was 'not thought to have strong political opinions of his own beyond nationalism, anti-communism and loyalty to Nimeiri'.<sup>110</sup> Thus, his challenge to the regime indicated the extent to which opposition to Nimeiri within the army was institutional rather than political.

After dismissing Khalil, Nimeiri selected Siwar al-Dahab, a man who reputedly possessed few political ambitions, to run the army on his behalf. He initially awarded him the evidently subordinate position of 'Deputy Commander' (*na'ib al-qa'id*), although he would eventually invest him as commander-in-chief in January 1985.<sup>111</sup> Throughout the period leading up to the *Intifada*, Siwar al-Dahab appears to have refrained from involving himself in Khartoum's internecine political struggles.<sup>112</sup> Meanwhile, Nimeiri replaced Khalil as vice-president with his intelligence chief, Umar al-Tayyib, and army resentment of the SSO continued to develop after this.<sup>113</sup> One factor in the rift between the military and the intelligence services was the conflict between Umar al-Tayyib and Taj al-Din Fadl, who would become Siwar al-Dahab's deputy commander-in-chief in January 1985. Taj al-Din Fadl had originally served as deputy head of the NSO, and had joined the SSO, but a clash of personalities with Umar al-Tayyib forced him to move to the army, where his resentment of the intelligence chief continued.<sup>114</sup> By the mid-1980s, therefore, inter-service rivalry between the army and SSO had reached a peak. It was a sign of Nimeiri's deteriorating relationship with the armed forces that he began to provide the SSO with anti-tank weaponry, which the military was astonished to discover when it raided SSO arms dumps in 1985. This seemed to suggest that the dictator had been preparing his principal security organ for a confrontation with the armed forces if it became necessary.<sup>115</sup>

The SSO not only managed to incur the enmity of the army and the police, but also brought about the hostility of a number of opposition parties in addition to the general public as it had acquired a reputation for corruption, brutality and abuse of power. The most notorious man in the SSO was the head of what came to be referred to as the 'torture unit', Aazim Kabbashi. *Al-Midan*, the underground SCP organ, claimed that Kabbashi had tortured one prisoner by keeping him locked in a cupboard without food for 3 days.<sup>116</sup> While *al-Midan* is a partial source, following the *Intifada* the mainstream press organs conducted interviews with a number of individuals who maintained that they had been tortured by the SSO. These interviewees knew about Aazim Kabbashi's torture unit and accused the SSO of whipping detainees, banging their heads against walls and placing them in stress positions.<sup>117</sup> The SSO, the officer cadre of which hailed mainly from the riverain core, was reputed to have exercised particular brutality against western Sudanese.<sup>118</sup> They also perpetrated acts of torture against members of the Ba'ath Party involved in the famous *muhakama al-fikra*, acts that would resurface and lead to the trial of the officers involved after the *Intifada*.<sup>119</sup>

Under Umar al-Tayyib, the SSO was also believed to have reached new levels of nepotism. Hasan Bayoumi, a former intelligence officer, maintains that a small cabal known as the *ahl al-thiqqa* ('people of trust') managed to get close to Umar al-Tayyib and persuade him to remove the most qualified officers.<sup>120</sup> Meanwhile, the transfer of the Ethiopian *fallasha* to Israel (see Chapter 2) was the most extravagant act of

corruption with which Umar al-Tayyib, whose post-1985 prosecutors claimed he had received 150,000 dollars from the American embassy as an incentive, was associated.<sup>121</sup> This further damaged the reputation of the SSO, after news of the transfers was reported in the world media in early 1985.<sup>122</sup> The images of corruption and brutality associated with the SSO were one of the reasons they provided a focus for popular discontent during the protests – a common chant was 'death ... to the dogs of security' (*mawt ... li kilab amn*).<sup>123</sup>

At the same time as making enemies of the political opposition and general public, in the 2 years preceding the *Intifada* they also managed to enter into conflict with the one political force still supporting the regime, the Islamic Movement. Umar al-Tayyib, a long-time political secularist, never appeared comfortable with Nimeiri's alliance with the Islamic Movement and his conflict with them took a public character in 1984 when al-Mukashifi al-Kabbashi, an Islamist sympathizer who headed the High Court of Appeal, used his position to jail al-Tayyib's brother for corruption and strip him of his assets.<sup>124</sup> Senior SSO officials frequently complained to Nimeiri about the side effects of his alliance with the ICF. In 1984, they protested to him about the damage that Ikhwan-dominated institutions like Faisal Islamic Bank were doing to the economy through monopolistic practices.<sup>125</sup> However, it is a testament to the effectiveness of the Islamic Movement's organization that the SSO were, by the admission of former officers, unable to infiltrate it even as it was itself actively recruiting members of the intelligence services.<sup>126</sup> Thus, the SSO as an institution, just like Nimeiri himself, played a major role in uniting opposition to the regime. They simultaneously provoked the antipathy of the public, the political parties, the police and, crucially, the armed forces.

## The genesis of political factions within the armed forces

While Nimeiri's policies were resented by the military on an institutional level, there were also factions within the armed forces that opposed the regime on both ideological and political grounds. After the various failed military coups of the early Nimeiri period, a number of political parties turned to building up their power bases within the army via more gradual methods. The ICF achieved this more systematically and effectively than other political parties, which is unsurprising given the extensive economic resources available to them. It is well known that after Nimeiri's promulgation of the September Laws in 1983, the movement launched a massive drive to recruit police, army and prison officers through the 'African Islamic Centre' (*al-merkaz al-Afriki al-Islami*), where they were sent by the government to obtain diplomas in 'the Islamic call' and study the principles of *shari'a* and *fiqh*.<sup>127</sup> On 20 October 1983, over forty officers graduated from this centre in a ceremony attended by Nimeiri, al-Turabi and other senior SSU figures.<sup>128</sup>

Al-Mirghani, a member of the new Free Officers' Organization, which was competing with the Islamic Movement for influence within the military, argues that the Islamists' plan to infiltrate the army began as early as 1977, when the leaders

of the Islamic Movement began to send directives to its members in the secondary schools to enter the Sudan War College, and to university graduates to enter the various technical units, including the medical corps, air corps and financial section.<sup>129</sup> This is supported by Yasin Umar Imam, then a senior member of the ICF, who acknowledges that from 1978 the Islamic Movement's leadership established a strategy of infiltrating the military with the conscious aim of facilitating a coup.<sup>130</sup> In 1982, the Movement moved to extend its support base to incorporate the rank and file, using its associated financial institutions and philanthropic agencies to provide new army recruits with loans from Islamic banks and new equipment.<sup>131</sup> These successes in obtaining faithful supporters at all levels of the military hierarchy mirrored the Islamic Movement's success in transforming itself into a mass movement elsewhere in Sudan at the time.

The depth of Islamist penetration of the military was, indeed, a result of direct government policy as much as covert party activity. According to Sa'id and al-Mirghani, it was at the time that Nimeiri announced his 'Islamization' programme in September 1983 that the Islamist presence within the army reached its peak. Indeed, this enabled some pro-Islamists within the military to pursue their political agendas quite openly. Officers sympathetic to the ICF brought *Ikhwanis* into their barracks to preach what al-Mirghani describes as 'religious fanaticism' to their troops.<sup>132</sup> The government established a new armed forces law that enabled military courts to flog both soldiers and officers found consuming alcohol, which horrified leftists and secularists in an army that had a long tradition of hardcore drinking.<sup>133</sup> While many throughout the army would have been open to the 'Islamization' drive – for instance, there are many Hausa, who have been core supporters of the Islamic movement since it started mobilizing a mass popular base in the late 1970s, in the army – others were marginalized. Non-Muslim Nuba and southerners had to be forced to attend the sermons conducted by radical Islamist preachers.<sup>134</sup> While the Islamists had substantially increased their presence in the military, they did not dominate it.

At the same time that the Islamist cell was beginning to consolidate itself, a new Free Officers' Organization (FOO) was beginning to form within the army to challenge its influence. Unsurprisingly, none of the members of the old Free Officers' group joined this new movement, the majority of them having either died in 1971 or taken up senior positions within the May Regime. The objectives of the new organization, which came into being in earnest around 1976 and then re-appeared in strength in 1983 after a period of inactivity, were similar to those of its elder namesake in 1964 (although not those of 1969). The revivification of the movement almost exposed it to annihilation in October 1983, after a number of its members were uncovered by military intelligence.<sup>135</sup> However, in spite of reportedly having been tortured, they did not reveal any information about the objectives of the cell and the army leaders thus chose to dismiss them rather than putting them on trial.<sup>136</sup>

Al-Mirghani, one of the founders of the organization, states that it incorporated sympathizers with the various 'modern' political parties – including Ba'athists and communists, and even the Islamist sympathizer Ibrahim Shams al-Din, who wished to bring an end to the military regime and return democracy to the country.<sup>137</sup>



The communists withdrew from the organization in 1977, fearing that it was planning another military coup that would provoke a backlash upon their party similar to that suffered after the 1971 Hashim al-Atta coup.<sup>138</sup> The Ba'athists, although less scarred by past experiences than the SCP, also had a lukewarm relationship with the Free Officer Organization. The origins of the Ba'athist cell date back to the Iran-Iraq war of 1980–8, when Sudan sent troops to support Ba'athist Iraq and Saddam Hussein repaid the favour by providing a number of Sudanese officers with training in Iraqi military colleges. These officers then formed the nucleus of the Ba'athist cell in the Sudanese army, and a leadership first emerged in January 1984.<sup>139</sup> The same cell also incorporated a number of DUP officers who were linked to the Ba'ath through the Alliance of the Sudanese People.<sup>140</sup> However, although the Free Officers persuaded one Ba'athist sympathizer, Abd al-Rahman Sa'id, to join the FOO when it re-emerged in 1983, he was not able to coax the leader of the Ba'athist cell, Uthman Balol, into participating. Uthman Balol was apparently afraid that the FOO had come to be too close to the United States, given that a senior Free Officer, Fathi Ahmad Ali, had recently spent 3 years as a military attaché in Washington.<sup>141</sup> In this sense, the non-Islamist oppositionists within the army were more divided than in the 1960s, when the Arab nationalists, communists and Ba'athists cooperated within one relatively cohesive 'Free Officer' movement until the cataclysm of 1971.

It seems, nevertheless, that there was a particular recrudescence of political activity within the military in the years leading up to 1985, with three separate ideological movements competing for influence. This in itself was indicative of the fact that – in spite of being the offspring of the Sudanese military's first radical movement – the May putschists had failed to impose the kind of rigid ideology upon Sudan's military that they needed to bind it firmly to the regime. Furthermore, the growth of the Islamist faction within the army and the military authorities' inability or unwillingness to challenge it illustrated the extent to which the regime's constant ideological shifts and fragile alliances were causing it to lose a grip on its agencies of coercion.

### Military-civilian links during the 1985 *Intifada*

Given the emergence of numerous cells representing ideological movements opposed to the government within the military in the period leading up to Nimeiri's ouster, it would be easy to assume that the significant role that the army played during the *Intifada* was a direct result of this politicization of this military. However, to do so would be to exaggerate the strength of these various groups, although the Free Officers were visibly engaged in encouraging opposition to the regime during the protests. On 2 April 1985, *al-Watan* reported that the FOO had issued a statement declaring that the Sudan Armed Forces were supporting the revolt against 'Hunger, ignorance and misrule, and for social justice and equality'.<sup>142</sup> Umar al-Tayyib was so disturbed by the movement's activities that he issued a statement on 4 April, 2 days before the success of the *Intifada*, denying that any such organization existed.<sup>143</sup> Former Free Officers have been quick to stress their part in forging military-civilian links in preparation for the *Intifada*. They maintain that members of the organization contacted the

various professional unions that would form the leadership of the *Intifada* in the days preceding its outbreak and informed them of their sympathy with the goal of regime change.<sup>144</sup> Nevertheless, it would seem that these liaisons were rather *ad hoc*. Leading professionals recall that Alliance leaders and discontented army officers coordinated and shared information, but that there was no 'joint movement'.<sup>145</sup>

The fact that these liaisons occurred does not mean that the Free Officers determined the army's behaviour during the *Intifada*, and their impact has to be understood within the context of the rapid and spontaneous development of anti-regime activity within the military and the public at large. Al-Mirghani concedes that the Free Officers' Organization was not strong enough to change the regime by itself and, thus resolved that it should restrict itself to supporting the civilian movement and encouraging opposition to the regime within the military.<sup>146</sup> Awad al-Karim Muhammad Ahmad, the chairman of the Engineers' Union, recalls that one of the Free Officers, Ali Tijani Ali, approached him and encouraged him to delay the mass demonstration that was being planned by the union leaders for the coming Monday till Wednesday, since on Wednesday the army unit on patrol in Khartoum would be one that was linked to the FOO. He states that although he succeeded in persuading the other union leaders to delay the demonstration till Wednesday on the basis that more time was needed, he never revealed the details of his communications with Ali Tijani Ali to them since it had already become clear on the streets that the army as a whole was siding with the public. However, it was also Ali Tijani Ali who, as the National Alliance was meeting to establish the National Charter on 5 April, provided Awad al-Karim with the information that the Army Forces Headquarters was about to take over and displace Nimeiri, and this foreknowledge seems to have given him the impetus to push forward the agenda of the professional movement and ensure that the National Charter was signed before Siwar al-Dahab's famous declaration of 6 April.<sup>147</sup> Thus the Free Officers assisted the professionals and helped to determine their policy at crucial times during the *Intifada*, although it was not their activity that made the *Intifada* possible.

The Islamist and Ba'athist cells were also active during the *Intifada*. It is worth bearing in mind that while the FOO was avowedly pro-democratic and opposed to military rule, both of these groups would be involved in attempted takeovers later in the decade – the successful Islamist coup of 1989 and the failed Ba'athist counter-coup of 1990. However, it seems that in 1985 neither of them came close to successfully effecting a coup, as much as they might have aspired to such an end. Sa'id claims that none of the political cells in the military was strong enough for this, and that members of the groups that he had interviewed denied even having made plans for such a thing.<sup>148</sup> On the other hand, former members of the Sudanese Ba'ath Party – which, as seen in Chapter 3, was probably the most effective of all the parties in mobilizing opposition to Nimeiri's regime in the year before the *Intifada* – recall that its civilian leader tried to persuade Uthman Balol as head of the military wing to launch a coup, but Balol refused.<sup>149</sup> Al-Mirghani states that as the *Intifada* was beginning on 26 and 27 April, the Ba'athists in the military began to gather and hold meetings, but that all this achieved was exposing them to military intelligence.<sup>150</sup> The current Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party leader now claims that after the Alliance of the Sudanese People military wing (which included the Ba'athists) brought two battalions from Jabal Awliya to the

army headquarters to put pressure on the military leadership, the army command placed all its leaders including Uthman Balol under house arrest, but released them after the intercession of other army units.<sup>151</sup> It seems that Taj al-Din Abdallah Fadl as deputy commander-in-chief chose not to take full action against these men because of the delicate political situation, although the army leadership would expel a number of them retrospectively in the months following the *Intifada*.<sup>152</sup> While the Ba'ath Party's civilian wing was at the forefront of the civil protests, therefore, the uprising appears to have come too early for the military faction. Nevertheless, both former military Ba'athists and one prominent ex-ICF member now contend that the Islamist faction did perceive that a Ba'athist coup was in the making, and that this led them to escalate the pressure on the army leadership.<sup>153</sup>

As seen previously, the civilian Islamic Movement adopted a somewhat ambivalent stance during the *Intifada*, being at odds with Nimeiri's regime and yet adopting a wary approach towards the National Alliance. Nevertheless, it has been claimed that the military Islamists directly influenced the outcome of the *Intifada*, through the person of Siwar al-Dahab's second in command, Taj al-Din Fadl. Abd al-Aziz Khalid Uthman maintains that he headed an Islamist group within the army that also included Umar al-Bashir, and that it was he who pressured the army to take control on 6 April to prevent the emergence of a secularist regime.<sup>154</sup> This narrative perhaps reflects Abd al-Aziz's frustration that Siwar al-Dahab's declaration of an army takeover thwarted the Free Officers' chances of developing closer links with secular factions in the National Alliance – in this sense, Taj al-Din acts as a convenient figure to blame. A more common and relatively more conservative assertion is that it was Taj al-Din who pressured a hesitant Siwar al-Dahab to announce that the armed forces were 'siding with the people'.<sup>155</sup> However, it is not usually acknowledged that he was part of an Islamist cell. Indeed, in 1973 he had been one of the main individuals responsible for crushing the Sha'aban uprising – in which the ICF had played a significant part.<sup>156</sup> Taj al-Din himself claims that he had no absolute political loyalties, although he states that at school he had sympathized with the National Unionist Party.<sup>157</sup> Members of the ICF who were active at the time identify Taj al-Din as having a neutral stance towards the party, or at least being only a sympathizer<sup>158</sup> – although given the separation between the civilian and military wings of the movement, it is possible that even if he had been in a cell, they would not have known the extent of his involvement. What is more widely acknowledged is that al-Bashir, who was a lieutenant-colonel in the paratroopers at the time, did play a role in informing on Ba'athist activity and endeavouring to mobilize officers within the armed forces against the regime.<sup>159</sup> Some Ba'athists now contend that al-Bashir motivated Siwar al-Dahab's actions on 6 April through his alleged efforts to inform the commander-in-chief of the danger of a Ba'athist takeover on 4 April.<sup>160</sup>

Claims have also been made that it was communication between civilian Islamists and Siwar al-Dahab that induced the latter to 'side with the people'. Ali Uthman Taha, who was one of the few civilian Islamists to escape Nimeiri's crackdown on the Islamic Movement in the previous month, claimed 2 years after the *Intifada* that he had addressed a letter to Siwar al-Dahab encouraging the army to take over to prevent bloodshed.<sup>161</sup> Other accounts state that this letter was a message from



al-Turabi himself, who managed to smuggle it out of prison with the assistance of a sympathetic warder.<sup>162</sup> It is difficult to gauge the veracity of these accounts, especially given that the Islamic Movement charged the media empire it acquired in the wake of the *Intifada* with the task of glorifying its role in the uprising and countering accusations that it had not participated. However, Abd al-Aziz Khalid Uthman, one of the Free Officers, delivers a similar account about Siwar al-Dahab receiving a message from al-Turabi.<sup>163</sup> Another part of this narrative that appears to have gained a degree of credence among both pro and anti-ICF sources is that Ali Uthman Taha and other members of the Islamic Movement then went on to bring senior members of the *ulama* (a body of Islamic scholars) to inform the vacillating general that he had their religious sanction to revoke his *ba'ya* (religious oath of allegiance) to Nimeiri.<sup>164</sup> Nevertheless, this narrative has been somewhat undermined by recent statements made by a senior ICF member, Amin Hasan Umar. Umar insists that Ali Uthman did send a message to Siwar al-Dahab informing him that his oath of allegiance should be considered as an oath not to Nimeiri but to the Sudanese state, and observes that he himself carried the message from Ali Uthman to a relative of Siwar al-Dahab at his house on the evening of 4 April. However, Umar now maintains that the commander-in-chief did not have the opportunity to read this message until just after he had made his famous statement on 6 April. He thus concedes that Siwar al-Dahab made his decision independently of the ICF.<sup>165</sup>

Siwar al-Dahab himself comprehensively denies that he was encouraged to seize power by the Islamic Movement. He does not acknowledge having met with any of its representatives in the period *before* the *Intifada* and, with regard to the story about the religious scholars, states that 'This is complete nonsense. Bring these *ulama* who met me!' Insisting that his decision to 'side with the people' was 'a purely military decision', he also argues that the claims that he was a member of the Islamic movement are exaggerated.<sup>166</sup> For instance, while Hasan al-Turabi maintains that Siwar al-Dahab was a member of the Islamic movement at secondary school, all that he himself acknowledges is that he voted for them in school elections on the grounds that he could choose between either them or the communists.<sup>167</sup> Nevertheless, he clearly holds conservative views, admitting that he sympathized with the execution of Mahmud Muhammad Taha.<sup>168</sup> Umar states that the ICF decided to approach Siwar al-Dahab because although he was not considered a member of the Islamic Movement, 'he was a religious man with links to the Khatmiyya'.<sup>169</sup> It may well be that even though Siwar al-Dahab was not directly prompted by the ICF to take power, his active antipathy towards the SCP and particularly the Ba'athists, who he may have feared were mobilizing for a coup, provided him the motivation. As we have seen, a number of Ba'athists now contend that it was Umar al-Bashir's decision to inform Siwar al-Dahab of a potential Ba'athist coup that jolted the commander-in-chief into action. Siwar al-Dahab – and possibly Taj al-Din as well – probably identified with Islamist political ideals in a broad sense, without having any specific sympathy for the particular party that happened to dominate the Islamic Movement at the time.

It is difficult to deny that members of political formations within the army, whether they were Ba'athist, Islamist, or Free Officer movements, all helped to sow dissent within the military. As will be seen below, the dissension spread by these junior officers

contributed significantly towards the decision of their more senior commanders to break with the regime. However, overstressing the agency of these political formations would lead us to neglect the more general discontent with the political situation within the military that had grown in particular since the conflict between Nimeiri and Abd al-Majid Khalil in 1982.

### The military-security conflict

Emphasizing the role of party politics within the military risks neglecting the importance of struggles between institutions and personalities. In particular, the *Intifada* was defined by the conflict between the army and the SSO, including its leader Umar al-Tayyib. In assessing the significance of this conflict, we should again bear in mind Bellin's observation that Arab regimes have tended to survive even extremely vigorous civil protest where the agencies of coercion remain cohesive and united. As observed above, it is unclear whether Nimeiri's intelligence chief was aspiring to take over the government himself or simply hoping to hold off the demonstrators until the president returned. However, he and the security units he commanded were the only group within the overall Sudanese security framework that took action against the protests that began on 26 March 1985, while the army remained passive and the police limited themselves to releasing the occasional burst of tear gas. From the beginning, the SSO deployed men on rooftops and sent plain-clothes gunmen among the crowd to shoot down demonstrators.

The friction appears to have reached its peak at a meeting between Umar al-Tayyib and the army leadership on 4 April. In this meeting, the director of military operations, Uthman Abdullah, presented a report that acknowledged the increasing criticism of the regime among army officers, observing that the recent unrest represented 'a political crisis and not a security crisis', and that trying to keep the regime in power would bring about 'a sea of blood and division within the armed forces'.<sup>170</sup> The report concluded that the army must step in to supervise the transfer of power to a temporary civilian authority.<sup>171</sup> Umar al-Tayyib was infuriated by this report, and ordered SSO agents to follow the activities of its principal authors, Uthman Abdullah and Faris al-Husseini. It appears that in this meeting he also faced numerous accusations of corruption and nepotism directed against his own person.<sup>172</sup> The enmity between him and his old foe Taj al-Din Fadl also appears to have revived itself through these events.<sup>173</sup>

In the wake of this stormy meeting, frustrated at the army's refusal to take actions against the crowds, Umar al-Tayyib began to send SSO agents in military clothing onto the streets to shoot at the demonstrators.<sup>174</sup> The calculation was probably that this would provoke general clashes between the armed forces and the crowds, which in turn would force the military to take the side of the regime. The ploy did not work, since the relationship between the soldiers on the street and the general public remained as pacific in the last days of the *Intifada* as it had throughout. Umar al-Tayyib's machinations also appear to have further incensed officers in the armed forces.<sup>175</sup> Again, this reflects the extent to which these officers saw themselves as part of a corporate institution and not simply an extension of the government.

There is, therefore, compelling evidence that it was friction between the various branches of the security forces that helped motivate the military to intervene and topple Nimeiri. This would support the contention that the coherence of the various agencies of coercion is crucial to the capacity of regimes to survive civil dissent.

### Tensions between the army leadership and senior commanders

Since the army's role in the *Intifada* was at least partly determined by institutional rivalry with the SSO at the highest levels, it is evident that very senior officers had an important part in mobilizing dissent against the regime. In particular, this included the director of military operations, Uthman Abdullah, and the six regional commanders stationed in Khartoum's six principal military regions. These individuals all helped to pressure the army leadership to take the side of the demonstrating public. While the role played by Uthman Abdullah is very complex, the role of the latter group in particular is interesting because they had no obvious links to any of the ideological organizations within the military.

The senior military leaders were not men of notably radical backgrounds. None of them had participated in the original Free Officer movement, although some of them shared social backgrounds similar to those of its protagonists. Taj al-Din Abdullah Fadl attended the same *Ahliyya* school as Jafaar Nimeiri, and had briefly worked as an accountant in one of the cotton projects in the Gezira before joining the military college in 1954.<sup>176</sup> However, he had no history of expressing the kind of sympathy towards civilian dissent that had brought the Free Officers into the political limelight in 1964, or had necessitated Abd-Majid Hamid Khalil's dismissal in 1982. Indeed, he proudly claims that he was the man who crushed the Sha'aban student uprising at the University of Khartoum in 1973.<sup>177</sup> Meanwhile, Siwar al-Dahab hailed from a more privileged background, his father having served as the representative (*khalifa*) of the Khatmiyya patron Sayyid Ali al-Mirghani in al-Ubayyid.<sup>178</sup> Like Taj al-Din Fadl, his actions in the past had been far from radical – as acting commander of the regiment stationed in Gedaref in 1964, he had taken a relatively neutral stance towards the October Revolution, and he had refused to surrender the garrison at al-Ubayyid to Hashim al-Atta during the latter's 3 day coup in 1971.<sup>179</sup> Thus, even though they had no particular ideological or patrimonial commitment to the regime – indeed, as we have seen, Taj al-Din Fadl possessed a number of grudges against Umar al-Tayyib – they were not men who would have been likely to oust it on their own initiative.

Thus, it is worth analysing the role of the regional commanders, who were more emancipated from the regime and applied pressure on Siwar al-Dahab and the general leadership from the army as an institution. These men hailed from a diverse range of social and political backgrounds. Fadlallah Burma Nasir, the commander of Bahri region, was born in South Kordofan, where his father and uncle had both served as leaders in the 'Native Administration' of the Misseiriyya Zuruq.<sup>180</sup> Given his conservative *Ansari* background, it is unsurprising that he had no links to the original Free Officer movement, and that he would join the Umma Party and become



Sadiq al-Mahdi's minister of defence upon retiring from the army in 1986.<sup>181</sup> However, Humada Abd al-Azim Humada claims that he actively helped to stage the 1969 coup alongside the Free Officers Khalid Hasan Abbas and Abu'l Gasim Muhammad Ibrahim – both of whom were still active members of the regime at the time of the *Intifada* – and identified with the Arab nationalist sentiments they had expressed.<sup>182</sup> Abd al-Aziz Muhammad al-Amin would join the DUP after his departure from the military following the transitional period.<sup>183</sup> Nevertheless, in spite of their diverse political backgrounds, the six regional commanders all seem to have corresponded as regards the view that they should reject orders to open fire on the crowds, and appear to have expressed these views in their meeting with the army leadership on the night before the major demonstration on 5 April. Nasir claims that he, among others, put particular pressure on an indecisive army leadership:

we were insisting that at 6 O'clock tomorrow the Sudanese people will go out to demonstrate ... we want your decision, instead they tried to avoid to tell us not to shoot or shoot ... and instead of giving very clear orders, they said the Gaddafi men [the 'Revolutionary Committees', agents of Gaddafi sent to Sudan under Abdullah Zakariyya to foment unrest against his enemy Nimeiri], tomorrow at 5 O'clock they will come out in the street to make some damages. And you know that they want to draw our attention away. And we answered them clearly, we are not interested in the Gaddafi people. We are interested in how we are going to treat our people. Give us your clear instruction, fire or no fire! And they said that there are policemen, and the policemen will take all the necessary steps, not to allow the demonstrations to come to the palace. I told them, if the people ... cross all the defence arrangements and went to the palace ... [they said], ok, if the people cross all the defence arrangements and they entered the palace they will fire on them ... so I said we are not going to obey that, we are not going to shoot! And we are not going to allow any person to shoot!<sup>184</sup>

While we have to be aware of potential exaggeration or self-justification here, it is certainly true that the army did not fire on the demonstrators during the period of the *Intifada* and this account at least indicates that there must have been some kind of conflict between the regional commanders and the army leadership, who were, effectively, representatives of the May Regime. As seen above, a number of the senior officers also exchanged heated words with Umar al-Tayyib at the meeting with the vice-president on 4 April. In this meeting, senior members of the army leadership actively refused to comply with his demand that the military declare a state of emergency.<sup>185</sup> Even though Siwar al-Dahab himself now maintains that the decision to 'side with the people' was made by the army leadership unanimously as soon as they witnessed the SSU demonstration of 2 April deteriorate into a 'farce' (*hazila*),<sup>186</sup> his statements at the time suggest that, personally, he was reluctant to take the side of the demonstrators until the very end. When he addressed the officers, NCOs and privates at the Omdurman garrison on the morning of 5 April, he attributed the demonstrations to the malign influence of the Ba'athist and communist parties and promised that the whole army would support Nimeiri.<sup>187</sup> It seems that following this, the regional commanders put further pressure on Siwar al-Dahab and other members of the leadership to change

their minds. Nasir now claims that he would have been put under house arrest had he not complied.<sup>188</sup>

Since, with the possible exception of Uthman Abdullah, none of these men were involved in the ideological cells within the army at this time, their response to their superiors does appear to have represented an *army* response to the situation. However, while the regional commanders were pressuring their superiors, they themselves were being pressured by their own subordinates. Immediately after their meeting with Siwar al-Dahab on 5 April, a number of these commanders had returned to their units to face angry demands from their junior officers, which they relayed to Siwar al-Dahab and Taj al-Din Fadl once they in turn had begun to visit the various regional commands.<sup>189</sup> Sa'id argues that it was their realization of the extent of the discontent among these junior officers that appears to have played an important role in pushing them to 'side with the people'.<sup>190</sup> Al-Mirghani asserts that officers in the Engineers' Corps and Armoured Corps even threatened to move their divisions into the centre of Khartoum if the army leadership did not step in and remove Nimeiri, effectively forcing Siwar al-Dahab's hand.<sup>191</sup> It is likely that some of this pressure was applied by officers attached to the Islamist, Ba'athist or Free Officer cells. Sa'id states that part of the reason the army leadership decided to act against Nimeiri was the fear expressed by the commanders of the Engineers' Corps and Armoured Corps that there would be a coup within the army led by partisans of either the left or the right.<sup>192</sup> However, it is possible that, given the frenetic pace at which events were unfolding, they overestimated the potential for such an eventuality. It is worth noting that even within the regional commands, a vast majority of the officers were simply expressing their own general frustration at the acts of the regime. Al-Mirghani alleges that it was on this night that the Free Officers played their greatest role, but admits they had (only) 'part of' the credit, and as seen above it is unlikely that any of the ideological cells were capable of bringing about a coup.<sup>193</sup>

The most intimately involved of all the senior officers was Uthman Abdullah, the director of military operations. It was he who suggested that the army take power to 'prevent bloodshed', both in the meeting with Umar al-Tayyib on 4 April and in meetings with the army leadership on 5 April, and it was he who penned Siwar al-Dahab's famous declaration of 6 April.<sup>194</sup> Sa'id suggests that there are a number of reasons why he was, to a certain extent, able to dictate events. First, he enjoyed the complete confidence of both Siwar al-Dahab and Umar al-Tayyib. Secondly, part of his job was to coordinate security arrangements for the capital in cooperation with the police, and his position provided him with the authority to issue instructions to every unit stationed within the capital. Thirdly, on account of his impressive professional qualifications and sociable nature, he was believed to have been both highly respected and liked among the higher, middle and lower ranks alike.<sup>195</sup>

However, the role of Uthman Abdullah was probably more complex than that of any other actor because he was, according to a number of accounts, playing a double game. At first, he seemed to be allying himself with the liberals in the military. According to Al-Mirghani, after he took up his position as director of military operations, he came into contact with the FOO and took an oath to join it.<sup>196</sup> Fathi Ahmad Ali, the leader of the FOO, claims that he visited Uthman Abdullah soon after the doctors' strike and informed him that members of his organization would refuse to obey orders

to open fire on civilians.<sup>197</sup> Al-Mirghani maintains that Uthman Abdullah, who also became the military's chief contact with the National Alliance when it was formed on 5 April, kept in constant contact with the FOO through the person of Abd al-Aziz Khalid Uthman, who worked in his office. He even suggests that Abdullah used a copy of the FOO political programme borrowed from Abd al-Aziz Khalid Uthman as the basis of the negotiations he conducted with the National Alliance on behalf of the military.<sup>198</sup>

Abd al-Aziz Khalid Uthman himself now recalls Uthman Abdullah's actions during the *Intifada* in a more cynical light. He believes that the director of military operations did not side with the public, but rather that by pushing the military command to take over themselves, he was the man who 'tamed the *Intifada*', and prevented its transformation from an uprising into a full-blown revolution. He recalls that his SSO contact at the time informed him that while Uthman Abdullah was suggesting that the military negotiate a transfer of power in army meetings, in security meetings he was pushing forward a policy of 'shoot to kill'.<sup>199</sup> Uthman Abdullah himself unsurprisingly denies ever having given such an order.<sup>200</sup> Nevertheless, a number of other sources support this story, including the then police chief Abbas Madani, who claims to have been on the receiving end of this particular injunction, and former SSO agents Abd al-Aziz and Abu Rannat, who argue that Uthman Abdullah was 'playing both sides' and waiting to see whether it was the army or the SSO who came out of events on top.<sup>201</sup> They recall that he gave 'full co-operation' to Umar al-Tayyib and the SSO until 12 o'clock on the night of 5 April.<sup>202</sup>

Did the senior officers 'side with the people' during the *Intifada*? It is easier in this context to prove negatives than positives. In the cases of crucial figures such as Uthman Abdullah, Siwar al-Dahab and probably other members of the army leadership, it seems that political survivalism rather than sympathy with the objectives of the popular uprising provided the real motive. This does not mean they were part of any great conspiracy to preserve the ideologies and institutions of the May Regime, but simply that they decided to abandon Nimeiri and Umar al-Tayyib only when it became clear that the rest of the army would not stand in the way of demonstrations against these two men. Other senior officers, particularly the regional commanders, did not enjoy the same proximity to the regime that Siwar al-Dahab and the army leadership did, and it is possible that their motives included a general sympathy with the demonstrating public, or at least a professional belief that the army should not be dragged into supporting an autocratic regime. Other important factors that should be considered are their rivalry with the SSO and the pressure exerted on these officers by their own subordinates.

It is also questionable whether the middle-ranking officers working as part of ideological groupings in the army were really 'siding with the people', at least if we interpret 'siding with the people' as a policy of replacing military authoritarianism with genuinely accountable one man, one vote democracy. It is worth remembering that both the Ba'athists and the Islamists would attempt to stage coups half a decade later, the latter group successfully. The Free Officers appear to have been more committed to establishing democracy, particularly if we believe Abd al-Aziz Khalid Uthman's statement that the organization was dissolved following the *Intifada* on the grounds



that it had achieved its purpose.<sup>203</sup> We should not downplay the agency that these groups exercised during the *Intifada* – after all, one of the reasons the army leaders took power in the manner that they did appears to have been their fear of the potential for a coup by one of the ideological groups in the armed forces. At the same time, it has to be acknowledged that such a coup would probably not have been possible at this juncture, and that discontent in the army as among the public had become general and was not confined to specific party groupings. Whether or not stories of ‘Islamist’ influences on Taj al-Din and Siwar al-Dahab are true, it is more likely that it was the pressure exercised on them by their subordinates that made them make the decisions they did.

### Police restraint in 1985

The police, just like the army, opposed Nimeiri’s regime on an institutional basis. As demonstrated above, the police force shared a number of the army’s grievances and, in particular, its resentment towards the SSO. As a result, it showed a similar lack of commitment to upholding the May Regime. At a conference held in November 1985, the National Alliance accepted the police force’s request that it should be acknowledged as being among the first forces that carried out the *Intifada*.<sup>204</sup> Participants in the uprising now recall that the police ‘helped the people’ because they were ‘linked to them’ and opposed the lack of ‘justice’ (*ʿadala*) under Nimeiri.<sup>205</sup> However, popular identification with the police occurred in a somewhat different context during the 1985 uprising. Whereas the 1964 rebellion broke out among the urban educated elite, the later *Intifada* was the fruit of a temporary social alliance between this group and the marginalized populations of the shanty-towns.<sup>206</sup> The fact that the police identified with the uprising and were remembered as being ‘linked’ to the people therefore reflects the shifting demographics of the police force itself, which after having been marginalized by the regime from the late 1970s onwards had increasingly resorted to recruiting from among the peri-urban poor.<sup>207</sup>

However, the extent to which the police force had an active and autonomous role in the 1985 uprising is questionable. During its first days, between 27 March and 3 April, it did participate in campaigns to rid the capital of the unemployed ‘vagrants’ held to be responsible for the protests, and used batons, tear gas and gunfire on rioters, reportedly killing between six and eighteen of them on 27 March.<sup>208</sup> Nevertheless, it appears that the attitude of the police towards the demonstrators gradually became more sympathetic. There were leaflets issued in the name of a ‘Police Officers’ Association’ indicating that the force would be willing to join in any campaign against the regime, although the government unsurprisingly dismissed these as propaganda spread by the Sudan People’s Liberation Army.<sup>209</sup> It was on 3 April that the police first appeared to participate alongside the demonstrators, who began to lift policemen onto their shoulders chanting ‘police go with the people’.

Some eyewitnesses recall that the police did not themselves participate in the demonstrations in any active way, and in this sense their actions were purely symbolic.<sup>210</sup> However, others recall that they effectively shepherded the demonstrations to act as a

'barrier against the SSO'.<sup>211</sup> According to the well-supported story cited above, Abbas Madani actively refused Uthman Abdullah's demands that the police should 'shoot to kill'.<sup>212</sup> By 5 April, one of the decisive days of the uprising, even the riot police were actively refusing to confront large crowds of protesters.<sup>213</sup> The response of the police to the civil protests was, therefore, just as significant as that of the army, and illustrated the same tendency of professionalism and resentment towards Nimeiri's personalized security agencies.

## Conclusion

The fact that the role of the 'Free Officers' in 1964 is given more attention in academic texts than that of the namesake organization in 1985 is a classic exemplar of the old adage that winners write the history books. Whereas the Free Officer movement of 1964 would spearhead a military coup 5 years later on, the 1985 organization disbanded itself soon after the restoration of democracy, on the – in hindsight, somewhat overoptimistic – pretext that since multi-party politics had returned to the country, it no longer served any purpose.<sup>214</sup> This explains the disparity in the degree of significance awarded to each movement by the historic narrative. During both uprisings, officers involved in each organization exerted a considerable amount of pressure on their seniors that played an important role in ensuring that the army 'sided with the people'; but they did not dictate the manner in which the transition from autocracy to democracy occurred.

During both uprisings, three important categories within the army can be identified. First and foremost, there was the army leadership, which was identified with the regime, although it embodied the government more directly in 1964 than in 1985, since leading army officers also held cabinet portfolios under Abboud. Secondly, there were the radicalized factions within the junior ranks who were affiliated to political cells within the military. Thirdly, there was a 'middle' category of senior and middle-ranking officers who were not a part of the immediate army leadership and thus acted as mediators between the first and second groups. In both cases it was this 'middle' group, rather than the junior radicals, that dictated the role that would ultimately be played by the army in the revolution. This group also tended to embody the corporate mind of the army as an institution, given that it was not directly incorporated into either the regime or the left- or right-wing factions among the junior ranks. However, there were links between the junior radicals and the higher echelons – Umar al-Haj Musa consciously protected the Free Officers in 1964, whereas Uthman Abdullah developed an altogether more nebulous relationship with the organization of the same name in 1985. There were also more specific interest groups within this middle-ranking faction pursuing their own agendas. In both uprisings, the senior officers who stood to gain most from military regimes that had been supported by the Khatmiyya were Umma/*Ansar*-affiliated generals such as al-Tahir al-Maqbul, Muhammad Idris Abdullah and Awad al-Soghayrun in 1964, and Fadlallah Burma Nasir, who would become the third parliamentary regime's minister of defence following his participation in the 1985 *Intifada*.

In some respects, the parallels between the military involvements in the two uprisings are striking. In both cases, politician factions within the military – the Free Officers in 1964 and the Islamists in 1985 – proved unwilling or unable to launch a coup, but used the experience to test their political mettle in preparation for a takeover around half a decade later. In both cases, social affinities between army officers and the urban elite were highly relevant. However, there were also important differences. In 1964, army intervention was determined partly by a principled belief that the military should not be dragged into politics, and partly by the fact that its junior officers were inspired by radical ideologies emanating from the wider Middle East. In 1985, the army, like the police, had far more general grievances against the May Regime, both because Nimeiri had endeavoured to marginalize it in favour of the SSO and because its privates and NCOs were suffering from the deteriorating economic situation just as much as other sectors of the population. Moreover, in 1985 the army leadership was not represented as directly within the government as was the case in 1964. For this reason, the army's decision to 'side with the people' was probably more inevitable in 1985 than in 1964, in spite of Siwar al-Dahab's vacillations. This same situation enabled the military leadership to take, perhaps somewhat undeserved, credit for the army's role in the uprising and establish itself as the dominant force in the political arena. Another significant difference in 1985 was that there were three main political organizations operating within the military, as opposed to one. This flourishing of political activity thus represented a power struggle between various factions just as much as it did an instinctive decision by the armed forces to 'side with the people'. Siwar al-Dahab himself 'sided with the people' so as to undercut these various competing factions.

The role played by the police force was also subtly different in 1985 from that in 1964, since the police, like the army, already had a number of pre-existing grievances against the regime and were thus considerably less disposed towards quelling the uprising on its behalf. However, once more it is possible to make broad comparisons between the role of the force in each of the two events. Although the clash with the students in 1964 sparked the uprising, after this the force lapsed into a passivity similar to that which was witnessed in 1985. This demonstrated the failures of both Abboud and Nimeiri, respectively, to establish a rigid divide between police and public. Both in 1964 and 1985, senior policemen hailed from the same relatively homogenous riverain elite that army officers, senior professionals and leaders of the major northern parties did. Thus, once it had become clear that the majority of the riverain elite and, in particular, the judiciary supported the anti-regime movement, it never appeared likely that the police would commit themselves to a forceful subjugation of the protesters. Even when the police did clash with the students during the famous seminar of 21 October 1964, the bungled manner of the operation demonstrated the limitations imposed on the use of the police as a serious tool of social and political control.

It cannot be said that either the army or the police created October 1964 or April 1985, although the manner in which they responded to the uprisings did to some extent determine the eventual outcome. The actions of all the various groups within the army were highly reactive and spontaneous. In 1964, the 'middle' group of senior and middle-ranking army officers swung between sympathizing with the old guard and identifying with the young radicals, depending on the course of events. In 1985, the



Ba'athist and Islamist factions, although initially established for the explicit purpose of launching a coup, were caught by surprise and thus found themselves not fully prepared for such a plan to be put into effect. Although the Free Officers coordinated with the professional movement to help stage the *Intifada*, they too were overtaken by the sheer pace with which the uprising unfolded. The army, or various factions within it, may at times have acted decisively to shape the course of the two uprisings, but for the most part, their actions were responsive, reflecting the internal divisions within the military. Nevertheless, the fact that the very existence of these divisions prevented a decisive show of support for the regime was in itself crucial to the success of the *Intifada*.

## The 1964–5 Transitional Regime: A Missed Opportunity?

The transitional period of 1964 is often cast in somewhat binary terms as a clash between 'communists and radical forces' who were slowly defeated by a 'conservative/traditional bloc'.<sup>1</sup> According to Mansur Khalid, the 'progressive elements of the Professional Front ... called for 'the phasing out of native administration, land and agrarian reforms and the pursuit of a non-aligned foreign policy', while 'those slogans did not go down well with the traditionalists who depended heavily for their survival on the traditional tribal leadership as well as the exploitation of the rural poor'.<sup>2</sup> Such statements reflect the contemporary influence of 'modernization theory', which assumed that 'modernity' and 'traditional values' such as ethnicity, sectarianism and clan loyalty were mutually exclusive values, and that the former would eradicate the latter.<sup>3</sup> However, more recent Africanist scholarship contends that ethnicity is a far more dynamic social and political force than modernization theorists would have us believe, and has facilitated political pluralism by enabling the representation of various social groups otherwise marginalized by authoritarian military-led governments.<sup>4</sup>

In the Sudanese case, the divides between the 'progressives' and the 'traditionalists' were not as decisive or as immediate as is often assumed. As will be seen later, many of the 'traditional' forces at the time shared the same agendas as the Professional Front and the SCP. The early phases of the transitional government witnessed a continuation of the same alliances, between parties and professionals, left and right, proletariat and bourgeoisie, which had characterized the Revolution itself. In 1964 there was no single issue that would prove to be as divisive as the September Laws would be in 1985, and thus the conflict within the revolutionary fronts – although constantly simmering below the surface – did not become immediately manifest.

### The Professional Front and transitional cabinet

An element of compromise was evident in the selection of both the interim cabinet and the Professional Front leadership. There had initially been tension between the *Ikhwani* and communist factions within the Front, with both sides accusing each other of attempting to create fake associations to boost their own representation. As seen previously, some claim that Hasan al-Turabi had been responsible for switching the

professionals' headquarters to the Doctors' Union on 26 October and had done so to outmanoeuvre the communists within the Front.<sup>5</sup> However, the meeting on 27 October was held at the house of a political independent, Ahmad al-Amin, where members appointed another neutral, Jafa'ar Karrar, as their chairman so as to ward off potential disputes between SCP and Muslim Brotherhood elements. The leadership of the Front picked two secretaries – one a communist (Farouk Abu Eissa) and the other a Muslim Brother (Ahmad al-Tijani) to support Karrar.<sup>6</sup> The professionals thus acknowledged the existence of separate factions within the Front and did their best to balance them against each other.

A similar series of compromises brought about the election of Sirr al-Khatim al-Khalifa as the interim prime minister. The Professional Front originally proposed left-leaning figures such as Abdin Isma'il, and then Taha Ba'ashar, as candidates for the position, but the more conservative political parties refused to accept either of these nominations.<sup>7</sup> Ultimately al-Khalifa, a senior civil servant from the ministry of education, was chosen because, like Karrar, his apparent lack of political affiliations made him acceptable to most parties. He hailed from a famous Khatmiyya family and was about to marry into a prestigious *Ansari* one until the Revolution delayed his wedding by 1 week.<sup>8</sup> This did not necessarily mean that al-Khalifa identified with the Umma, NUP or PDP any more than it meant that the numerous radical, secular or leftist figures with *Ansari* or *Khatmi* connections did. He was, of course, a professional himself. His fellow professionals also believed him to be a popular and competent man who had few political enemies and was acceptable to the public in the south, where he had recently spent 11 years working for his ministry.<sup>9</sup> However, it is noteworthy that it was leaders of the student union at the Technical Institute, which was controlled by a party affiliated with the Umma and NUP, who originally approached him and brought him into the Professional Front, and that it was an NUP man, Mubarak Zarroug, who nominated him for the post of prime minister.<sup>10</sup> While he cannot exactly be characterized as a 'reactionary' figure, his appointment belies the notion that the left dominated the transitional government from the very start.

The election of the interim cabinet also represented a subtle balancing act. The United National Front (UNF) – the body that brought the political parties and the Professional Front together – had initially agreed upon a plan that would guarantee its political neutrality. According to this plan, the political parties and the professionals would share the right to nominate ministers to the interim cabinet. Five political parties – the Islamic Liberation Front, the Sudan Communist Party, the Umma Party, the National Unionist Party and the People's Democratic Party – would each have the right to put forward one minister.<sup>11</sup> The individuals that were appointed all turned out to be senior party representatives, such as Muhammad Ahmad Mahgub of the Umma, who became foreign minister, or the Brotherhood's Muhammad Salih Umar, who acquired the Animal Resources portfolio.<sup>12</sup> Meanwhile, the UNF agreed that the Professional Front would have the right to nominate eight ministers, and the 'Southern Front' two.<sup>13</sup>

It was the appointment of the Professional Front's nominees that generated the controversy that would dominate the first transitional government. Political conservatives argued at the time, and have argued since, that the SCP and the



Professional Front – which it supposedly dominated – used this arrangement to impose leftist ministers on the cabinet.<sup>14</sup> Al-Sadiq al-Mahdi maintains that the professionals tricked the parties, claiming that the UNF and Professional Front had originally agreed that the professional representatives would have no political affiliation, and that the Professional Front betrayed this agreement by nominating communists or 'fellow travellers'.<sup>15</sup> One contemporary Islamist denigrator of the October Revolution has even gone so far as to assert that there were 'eleven communists' in the fifteen-man transitional cabinet.<sup>16</sup>

This is going too far. Only three members of the interim cabinet were active SCP members: Ahmad Sulayman, the minister of agriculture, Amin Muhammad al-Amin, the minister of health, and Shafi' Ahmad al-Shaikh, the minister of labour.<sup>17</sup> While these were hardly key portfolios, the Umma's representative, Muhammad Ahmad Mahgub, obtained the crucial post of foreign minister and the NUP man, Mubarak Zarroug, became finance minister.<sup>18</sup> Admittedly, a number of the other ministers were 'very near to the Communist Party, but not members of it'.<sup>19</sup> Abdin Isma'il, the left-leaning chairman of the Bar Association who acquired the local government portfolio, probably fitted within this category. However, the information minister Khalafallah Babikir was more of a pro-Egyptian than a pro-communist.<sup>20</sup> Such individuals struck political alliances with the SCP because – in contrast to other North African and Middle Eastern territories where Arab nationalists and Communists entered into, at times violent, political conflict – the religious parties were so strong that they compelled adherents of these two modern ideologies to combine to put forward a secular agenda. In 1968, Abdin Isma'il as a 'socialist' and Khalafallah Babikir as an 'Arab Nationalist' would join a coalition of 'leftist forces' that comprised communists, Independent Marxists, socialists and Arab nationalists, to put forward a leftist candidate in the 1968 elections.<sup>21</sup>

At the same time, other interim ministers were genuinely chosen on the basis of their qualifications rather than political affiliation – for instance, Rahmatullah Abdullah was not even a member of the Professional Front but was chosen as minister of education due to his experience in the field.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, it should be observed that leftist ideologies were prevalent among educated and professional elites in general at the time – just as Islamist ideals had acquired a certain hegemony in 1985. Thus, the fact that a number of the ministers in the interim regime sympathized with the SCP was hardly as much evidence of direct political manipulation by the party as a reflection of broader trends within Sudanese intellectual and political life. As we have seen, the SCP was in many regards more a left-wing faction within a wider bourgeois nationalist movement than a direct representative of the oppressed proletariat.<sup>23</sup>

The cabinet was hardly a 'government of the workers' – only Amin Muhammad al-Amin, the representative of the Gezira tenants, and the veteran trade unionist Shafi' Ahmad al-Shaikh fell within this category. Apart from these two, it was very much a bourgeois government, employing five lawyers (Mubarak Zarroug, Abdin Isma'il, Ahmad Sulayman, Muhammad Mahgub, Ahmad Sayyid Hamad), two former ambassadors (Rahmatullah Abdullah and Abd al-Karim Mirghani), three civil servants (Khalafallah Babikir, Clement Mboro and Sirr al-Khatim al-Khalifa), a university lecturer (Muhammad Salih Umar), and a journalist (Ambrose Wol).<sup>24</sup> Abu Eissa refers

to these men as 'effendiyya', utilizing the term coined during the Condominium period to refer to the elite produced by the colonial education system.<sup>25</sup>

The northern ministers were all men who hailed from the riverain centre of Sudan – it is perhaps revealing that it was not the transitional government but the subsequent Umma-led parliamentary governments, deemed 'reactionary' by the 'modern forces', that would incorporate Darfuri ministers for the first time.<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, the fact that a southerner, Clement Mboro, became minister of interior was of considerable consequence. For such a major position to be obtained by a representative of a regional group that had previously touched only the fringes of northern Sudanese politics suggested the radical nature of the new regime. In this regard, the 1964 transitional government can be loosely compared to that of 2005 in that it empowered militant southerners while doing little to embrace the marginalized peoples of the north.

The incorporation of these militant southerners, and the presence of the leftist ministers in the cabinet, would soon set the stage for a clash with the more conservative political forces. However, it would be the combustible relationship between the cabinet and the military that exposed the first cracks within the new regime.

### Civil-military relations and the 'Night of the Barricades'

The relationship between the military and the interim regime at the beginning of the transitional era was the product of another series of compromises. While the army had agreed to relinquish the key post of minister of defence to the transitional prime minister Sirr al-Khatim al-Khalifa, they were simultaneously able to negotiate Abboud's retention as the head of state. This ensured that the military continued to have a say in Sudanese politics – although it remained divided, just as it had been in the revolutionary period, between relatively conservative factions sympathetic to the old regime and those that identified with the junior radicals. These conflicts within the military would define the subsequent phases of the Revolution.

The conservatives within the army leadership attempted to use the transitional period as an opportunity to root out those young officers who had displayed their radical proclivities in Sudan's 'Revolutionary week'. They struck on 7 November, when Abboud arrested seven officers associated with the Free Officer Organization, including Jafa'ar Nimeiri, Rashid Nur al-Din and Faruq Hamdallah. The press later reported that these individuals had been accused of plotting a coup on behalf of a foreign power, presumably Egypt.<sup>27</sup> However, it seems that the real reason for their detention was that they had presented a petition to their seniors demanding the dismissal of every member of the November junta from the military. Bireir, although his chronology is somewhat confused, maintains that Awad al-Soghayrun had presented Abboud with a list of twenty-four officers whom he advised the president to pension off, claiming that they had been witnessed at a conspiratorial meeting in Jafa'ar Nimeiri's house.<sup>28</sup>

Abboud's decision to apprehend the seven men provoked an immediate response. Free Officers who had escaped arrest began to distribute pamphlets condemning the detentions.<sup>29</sup> Meanwhile, the SCP chairman Abd al-Khaliq Mahgub contacted Farouk Abu Eissa and instructed him to mobilize the Professional Front to protest against

the decision.<sup>30</sup> Abu Eissa then contacted Jafa'ar Karrar and the other professional leaders, and together they agreed to arrange demonstrations to voice opposition to the arrests, entering cinemas and football stadiums to warn the public of the dangers of a reactionary coup.<sup>31</sup> The Front met and members of the Bar Association proposed a motion that all the former SCAF generals should be taken into custody; the leadership of the Professional Front accepted this proposal and sent news to the cabinet informing them of their decision.<sup>32</sup> As this was happening, four members of the cabinet – Sirr al-Khatim al-Khalifa, Abdin Isma'il, Clement Mboro and Mubarak Zarroug – met with Abboud to complain about the arrest of the Free Officers, rejecting the president's claim that he was pursuing a purely internal military matter.<sup>33</sup> Under pressure from the crowds massing in the street around the cabinet building, Abboud accepted the Front's demand and ordered the arrest of all the former strongmen of the old regime. They included the entire SCAF other than Abboud himself, as well as the senior police officials Ahmad Abdullah Abbato and Abbas Muhammad Fadl, and the previous foreign minister Ahmad Khair.<sup>34</sup> The decision represented a victory for professional solidarity against military intransigence.

The prime minister's assault upon Abboud's old guard did not exactly represent a 'swing to the left'. Of the four ministers who met with Abboud, only Abdin Isma'il had any links to the SCP. That a leftist, a southerner and an NUP man would join together with al-Khalifa to support his protest against Abboud indicated that the desire to stamp out any legacies of the military regime was more significant than the divisions that existed among the various political parties at this time. Moreover, the two army officers with whom the cabinet consulted to arrange the arrests, Muhammad Idris Abdullah and Baqar Abu Bakr, were men with no known connections with the Free Officers. This indicates that the senior and middle-ranking officers immediately outside the ranks of the former regime were still in charge at this point.

Nevertheless, the events that occurred a few hours after the arrests of the former SCAF men proved far more divisive – to the extent that it remains, up till the present, difficult to piece together an objective narrative of what occurred. It was reported in the press the next day that Uthman Nasr of the Signallers' Corps had been preparing a coup that would overthrow the transitional regime. The Professional Front had issued a warning via Omdurman Radio calling upon the people of Khartoum to come to protect the radio station and the cabinet building. The crowds had then flocked to these two buildings, and barricaded the Blue and White Nile bridges so as to prevent the tanks rolling into central Khartoum.<sup>35</sup> This is why the evening of 9 November 1964 would later become known as the 'Night of the Barricades' (*laila al-mataris*).

The question of whether or not a coup by Uthman Nasr was genuinely imminent remains a contentious one. Sirr al-Khatim Khalifa came on the radio later in the evening and denied that there had been any movement in the army, urging the demonstrators to return to work.<sup>36</sup> A number of anti-communist sources now assert that the whole story was a fictitious one spread by the SCP and their leading representative in the Professional Front, Farouk Abu Eissa – who is said to be the man who broadcast the rumour of the coup on Omdurman Radio.<sup>37</sup> It is indisputable that the SCP had a major role in circulating the story, whether it was true or false – other members of the Front who participated in the anti-coup demonstrations remember that it was communist



acquaintances who told them that the Signallers' Corps was planning a takeover.<sup>38</sup> Abu Eissa acknowledges that he had a role in mobilizing the Front and obtaining permission from the director of the radio station for the statement warning of the coup to be broadcast – although he states that it was the regular newsreader, rather than he himself as is usually maintained, who read out the statement. Nevertheless, he insists that there had genuinely been a *putsch* in the making, stating that he was informed about separate movements in the Service Corps (*salah al-khidma*) and Signallers' Corps (*salah al-ishara*) by members of his party and by students inhabiting the 'barracks' dormitory adjoining the army training grounds, respectively. He claims that his student informers had been sent by their families to discover why relatives in the Signallers' Corps had not returned home for tea, and had witnessed Uthman Nasr declaring to his men that the corps 'was going to restore the honour of the army which had been dragged through the mud by the *effendiyya*'.<sup>39</sup>

An alternative explanation for the rumours about the coup is offered by Free Officer insider Mahjub Bireir. Bireir claims that they were fictitious, but asserts that the deception originated not within the SCP, but within the army itself. Bireir maintains that a number of junior and middle-ranking officers had wished to see further purges among the senior army command, and thus effectively used the SCP as their tool by providing members of the party with a fictional story about a proposed coup attempt so that the resulting popular backlash would lead to further cleansing in the military.<sup>40</sup> As is the case with the other stories that concern these events, it is impossible to either confirm or deny Bireir's account. However, if it is true, it would support a somewhat more realistic picture of Free Officer activity during this period, in which the movement chose to subtly influence the course of events rather than making itself the powerhouse of the Revolution.

What is perhaps more interesting than the factual verity of the numerous claims made regarding the 'Night of the Barricades' is the manner in which the various political blocs within the Professional Front interacted in responding to the perceived threat of a military counter-revolution. It seems that the fears of a reactionary coup united the diverse civilian factions. Among the members of the Front who accompanied Farouk Abu Eissa to the radio station to broadcast the news of the supposed takeover were two members of the Muslim Brotherhood, including the General Guide (*al-Murshid al-'Aam*) Ali 'Alaballah.<sup>41</sup> Leftists who participated in the 'Night of the Barricades' tend to acknowledge that individuals associated with the other political parties joined them in the streets to help ward off the rumoured coup. Fathi Fadl, one of the communists on the KUSU executive committee, claims that representatives of all political factions within KUSU came out onto the street on the evening of 9 November, because their enmity towards the military was far greater than that towards their civilian adversaries.<sup>42</sup> Abd al-Hamid Fadl, the Umma-affiliated president of the Technical Institute student union, admits that he believed the coup rumour when he heard it from Shaikh Rahmatullah, a student communist who served as secretary of the KUSU executive committee, and went on to lead all the students of the Technical Institute towards the Blue Nile Bridge.<sup>43</sup> Meanwhile, Ali Abdullah Yaqub insists that it was the Muslim Brotherhood who organized the closure of the bridge to prevent an army takeover.<sup>44</sup> Even in the western town of Nyala, where the

SCP had sparse political support, the local press reported that civil disobedience had been declared, that 5,000 people had demonstrated in the towns and that there had been plans for the people of the town to drive to Khartoum to protect it from the military reactionaries.<sup>45</sup> In other words, there was still widespread cooperation between members of the various social and political factions at the time of the 'Night of the Barricades'. These events were defined by the same unifying streak of urban nationalism that had characterized the Revolution itself.

Although the broad composition of the demonstrations witnessed during the night of 9 November illustrated just how cohesive the pro-democracy movement still was, events later in the evening would provide the catalyst for the emergence of serious schisms and, ultimately, the disintegration of the Professional Front. It seems that when the rightists within the Front came to believe that the coup rumour had not been true after all, bitter recriminations broke out with their colleagues on the political left. Mallasi recalls that he returned to the Lecturers' Club later that evening and discovered members of the Brotherhood haranguing the various leftists present and protesting that the coup story was part of a conspiracy organized by the SCP and Farouk Abu Eissa, whom they were threatening to hang for his role.<sup>46</sup> The disputes then persisted after Khalafallah Babikir broadcast a statement from the Ministry of Information denying that there had been any military plot. Mallasi states that senior members of the Front continued rowing as they drove to the ministry in the wake of this news, and at one point they had to stop their car to prevent Farouk Abu Eissa from physically strangling Hasan al-Turabi.<sup>47</sup> Abu Eissa argues that Mallasi 'dramatically exaggerated' his fracas with al-Turabi, but concedes that the atmosphere was 'full of tension'.<sup>48</sup>

It appears that these events upset the delicate series of compromises that had held the Professional Front together. Ali Abdullah Yaqub asserts that the next day he helped to organize an anti-SCP march with the collaboration of the Umma Party and NUP, with participants proceeding towards the ministry of information chanting 'Abd al-Khaliq [Mahgub] is the enemy of God' and 'Khartoum is not Moscow'.<sup>49</sup> As will be seen, these three parties – the NUP, Umma and the Muslim Brotherhood – would later collaborate on a number of issues, though not all, to combat what they perceived to be the SCP agenda. The rifts within the Professional Front appear to have widened after this date, and led to a major decline in its ability to influence transitional politics.<sup>50</sup> Jafa'ar Karrar would later lament that the left and right had simply not given the centre a chance.<sup>51</sup>

The political whirlwind that blew through Sudan between 7 and 9 November also left its mark on the army. The detention of the seven Free Officers exposed tensions between the officers who sympathized with the junior radicals and those who feared them. According to Bireir, other Free Officers who escaped arrest were able to utilize their contacts within the cabinet to secure the release of their imprisoned colleagues.<sup>52</sup> They were, indeed set free on 11 November.<sup>53</sup> This immediately provoked a conflict within the army leadership between senior officers such as Hasan Fahl, Umar al-Haj Musa and al-Tayyib al-Mardi – the latter two would become ministers under the May Regime – who sympathized with the movement and had supported the move to get the Free Officers released, and Abboud and Awad al-Soghayrun who had been responsible for their arrest.<sup>54</sup> The less conservative faction won out, with the assistance of a report

from the clandestine Free Officer and head of military intelligence Babikir al-Nur, which comprehensively denied the allegation that a conspiratorial meeting had been held in Jafar Nimeiri's house.<sup>55</sup> This seemed to indicate that in the military, at least, the radicals were starting to enter into the ascendancy. By the end of November, both Abboud and Awad al-Soghayrun had been removed by the cabinet.<sup>56</sup> Nevertheless, Abboud was still permitted to dictate his choice of replacement as commander-in-chief. He elected General Khawwad Muhammad, who he believed to be a relatively apolitical officer who would steer the army away from radical ideologies.<sup>57</sup>

The series of events surrounding the 'Night of the Barricades' thus proved to be just as critical to the overall outcome of the Revolution as those that had occurred between 21 and 28 October. They exposed the severity of the divisions that existed within the army between radical and conservative factions, and the fact that the former was gradually increasing its influence. At the same time, they led to the complete removal of the military presence within the government. They raised the Professional Front to the summit of its influence, and then saw it fragment in the wake of inter-party rivalry. They revealed how powerful and expressive a force the northern Sudanese urban public could be when it was united by the ideals of nationalism and democracy, but also generated divisions that would exacerbate themselves as the transitional period continued.

### Election disputes and the disintegration of the transitional government

The tensions that manifested themselves within the Professional Front after the 'Night of the Barricades' were soon matched by a more wide-ranging series of disputes that encompassed the cabinet, the professionals and the political parties. While it was the issue of Islamic law that would divide the left and right in 1985, in 1964 it was debates over the timing and nature of the upcoming elections that polarized ideological differences within the transitional government. However, although disagreements over this issue were perhaps inevitable, they were not immediate.

To understand how a government that comprised various 'satellites' of the competing political parties could forge any kind of common position, we have to understand the nature of its social composition. Apart from the two southerners and the two workers' leaders, the other eleven members of the transitional cabinet represented the professional bourgeois of the urban north. As a result of this, there was considerable social affinity between these ministers, which transcended party boundaries. The fact that five of them were lawyers was particularly important. Observations made by the British Ambassador following a meeting with one of these five, Muhammad Ahmad Mahgub, are indicative of the role that professional and social ties played in uniting the cabinet:

The foreign minister, both at this and a different point, made remarks which suggest that he regards the Sudanese Communists with some equanimity. Speaking of Ahmad Suleiman, the Communist minister of agriculture, he said that the minister



was a communist 'only in name'. We know that Ahmad Suleiman, together with another Communist minister, Abdin Isma'il, is a constant visitor of the foreign minister's house. Ahmad Suleiman begun his law career in the foreign minister's chambers and the two men are close personal friends. Ahmad Suleiman is a man of considerable charm and persuasive ability and it may be that his influence over the foreign minister is greater than the foreign minister thinks.<sup>58</sup>

An important fact overlooked by this source was that Ahmad Sulayman, Abdin Isma'il and Muhammad Ahmad Mahgub were all members of the Bar Association, which reinforced the solidarity between them.

The fact that professional and personal affinities were so significant leads us to question whether the importance of party ideologies has been overestimated. It is worth remembering in this context that a number of Sudanese politicians in this era, like Mahgub and Sulayman, joined parties not simply for ideological reasons but also because they provided a launch pad for their political careers. Mahgub, although he was a member of the Umma Party, was often critical of the programmes put forward by al-Sadiq al-Mahdi.<sup>59</sup> There were many intellectuals and professionals in the SCP, but part of the reason for this was the fact that they considered it the only genuinely national party, given that apart from the Muslim Brotherhood the other major political parties all relied upon patrimonial religious orders for their backing.<sup>60</sup> Their commitment to Marxists ideals was often somewhat lukewarm. Ahmad Sulayman, for instance, would later switch allegiance to Nimeiri's SSU, and then to al-Turabi's NIF.<sup>61</sup> He, Abdin Isma'il and Farouk Abu Eissa – the three SCP/pro-SCP lawyers who were so influential in the Revolution itself – were all happy to distance themselves from the party and side with Nimeiri during the rift of 1970. This kind of 'political nomadism' reflected the fact that in Sudan, as elsewhere in the region, class boundaries were fluid and class-based ideologies imported from the West were not adhered to as rigidly as they were in countries where social classes were clearly defined.<sup>62</sup>

One positive consequence of the professional camaraderie that united these individuals was that they were able to agree on significant changes to the electoral law. In a series of decisions between November and December 1964, the cabinet determined that the voting age would be lowered from 21 to 18, candidates as young as 30 would be permitted to contest, and women would be given the vote for the first time in Sudanese history.<sup>63</sup> It also resolved to further the representation of the 'modern forces' by increasing the number of seats set aside for university graduates to fifteen.<sup>64</sup> This was in effect a sop to the left and in particular the SCP, which would win eleven of these seats when the elections took place.<sup>65</sup> Although there was lengthy debate within the cabinet over the measures concerning the age of suffrage and candidature, and the NUP and Umma were said to have been against the decisions,<sup>66</sup> no major political crisis emerged as a result. Although the increase in graduate representation empowered the SCP, it was the university-educated elite that provided the party with its leadership – and enabled it to identify on both a social and professional level with the men who led the transitional government – that benefited the most.

Two other issues regarding the elections provoked a far greater division within the cabinet. First of all, in January 1965, the SCP proposed allocating 50 per cent of the seats in the new parliament to workers' representatives. This was supported by the

Professional Front, in addition to the PDP, which had entered into an alliance with the SCP.<sup>67</sup> As we have seen, in the aftermath of the Revolution, the PDP had become a vehicle for Nasserists and Ba'athists within the 'modern forces.' Mallasi claims that the Khatmiyya leadership, even though it had established the PDP, did not interfere significantly in the running of the party during this period.<sup>68</sup> However, other religio-political parties vehemently opposed the proposed electoral measures, claiming that they were 'undemocratic'.<sup>69</sup> It was at this stage that the upcoming elections became a party political issue, with the PDP, SCP and Professional Front uniting against the ICF and Umma Party, and the NUP temporarily attempting to take a middle position so as to appease its own supporters among the 'modern forces'.<sup>70</sup>

This reminds us that the quarrels of the transitional period cannot be understood as simply the product of a schism between the 'modern forces' and 'reactionaries' – the Muslim Brotherhood was constituted by far more 'modern' elements than the *Sufi* Khatmiyya patrons of the PDP, but ultimately took a far more conservative stance towards the principle of sectoral representation so as to undermine its socialist nemesis. It was also interesting that the two parties that advocated more favourable representation for the 'modern forces', as opposed to strict one man, one vote democracy, were the same two parties that had been willing to participate in elections for Abboud's Central Council. This revealed some of the internal contradictions of the Revolution – its protagonists struggled to reconcile the principles of pure democracy and modernization. At the same time, the fact that the radicals were able to secure individual seats to represent university-educated professionals, but not farmers or urban labourers, is evidence of the narrow social base of the Revolution.

Without workers' representation, the SCP could not hope to exert a substantial influence within any democratic parliament. As a result of this, the party and its affiliated unions advocated postponing the elections until a further series of reforms could be effected by the transitional government.<sup>71</sup> Specifically, these reforms included the dissolution of the Native Administration, further anti-corruption purges and the solution of the 'southern problem'.<sup>72</sup> The SCP had vested interest in the first two issues in particular. Again, they were supported in their proposals by the Professional Front and the PDP,<sup>73</sup> and vigorously opposed by the NUP and Umma Party, in addition to the ICF and other branches of the Muslim Brotherhood.<sup>74</sup> The former two parties knew that the upcoming elections would almost certainly put them back in control of the government, and while the Muslim Brotherhood had comparatively little to gain from democratic elections, it knew that they would serve its principal goal at the time of preventing the SCP from acquiring an influence in the government.

The debates over the elections generated a series of particularly acrimonious disputes between the involved parties in the press, which exhausted the goodwill that had been built up as a result of their shared participation in the pro-democracy struggle. The pro-Umma press accused the SCP of trying to bring about a regime akin to that which existed in the Soviet Union, in which 'each individual is a spy against his brother', and 'the Russians do not allow [their people] to leave their country like the other peoples of the world'.<sup>75</sup> One writer in the pro-Umma organ *al-Nil* argued that in trying to delay the elections, the SCP were attempting to 'deny the individual his basic freedoms and rights,' and to put power in the hands of 'a small minority raised above the level of the

ordinary man'.<sup>76</sup> It is likely that this animosity between the political parties within the press also played a role in preventing compromises between party 'satellites' within the cabinet and Professional Front. Moreover, what is particularly significant is that a party that was closely associated with a neo-revivalist Islamic religious order began to use the language of democracy, individual rights and anti-totalitarianism in order to ward off the challenge posed by the political left. This essentially secular discourse was just as important as the party's religious critique of communism, and further reminds us that there was no binary conflict between religion and modernity in the transitional period.

The disputes over the elections undermined the unity of the Professional Front, and changed its relationship with the political parties. After its public support for the PDP and SCP proposals, anti-leftists in the media attacked it for trying to behave like a political party.<sup>77</sup> Umma and ICF representatives within the Front came to realize that by staying in it, they were implicitly opposing the policies of their own organizations. On 18 January, the Student Union of the Technical Institute, which was headed by the Umma's Abd al-Hamid Fadl, withdrew from meetings of the Front and demanded that the body be re-organized.<sup>78</sup> The next day, the various parties opposed to the extension of the transitional period declared that they were removing the Professional Front from the membership of the United National Front.<sup>79</sup> In the following weeks, the Khartoum University Teachers' Union, in which the Muslim Brotherhood was heavily represented,<sup>80</sup> joined the Doctors' Union and the Islamic Qadis in withdrawing from the Professional Front.<sup>81</sup> Thus, the very bodies that had made the October Revolution were now fragmented and detached from the political mainstream.

By this stage, the position of the political left had been weakened considerably. Sadiq al-Mahdi was confident enough to reject an SCP proposal that the transitional cabinet be re-formed so as to incorporate an Umma prime minister, four or five Umma ministers, three ministers from the NUP, one or two ministers to represent the PDP, and a minister each for the SCP and other parties with minor representation, in addition to one representative for the farmers and workers.<sup>82</sup> The fact that the SCP made such a generous proposal suggests that it knew the weakness of its position. Nevertheless, the Professional Front nominees in the cabinet continued to use their positions to attack the political parties that had opposed the extension of the transitional period. On 6 February, Khalafallah Babikir, the minister of information, broadcast a virulent public condemnation of the Umma, NUP and Muslim Brotherhood, accusing these parties of 'treachery' and of endeavouring to 'waste the profits of the October Revolution'.<sup>83</sup> It appears that Babikir nominally broadcast this statement on behalf of the entire cabinet, although it was evident that he had not consulted the ministers representing the political parties he attacked.<sup>84</sup> The parties he had targeted soon issued a counter-statement observing that his broadcast 'serves only colonial purposes,' and aimed at 'crippling democratic life within the country'.<sup>85</sup>

Khalafallah Babikir's statement brought about a catharsis of the tensions between the SCP and its allies, and the religious right. The crisis initiated by his broadcast introduced a scenario in which physical exhibitions of force on the streets became a vital part of the political negotiations. It is often observed that it was the Umma's sizeable



base of loyal constituents within rural Sudan that guaranteed its robust performances in democratic elections. What is often forgotten is that it was the physical manpower the *Ansar* as a military-religious organization could provide that ensured that the elections took place on the terms that the Umma Party and its allies dictated in 1965. Admittedly, the *Ansar* were not the most powerful military force in the country at the time. They were equipped with mainly pre-modern weaponry, and as would be seen at Aba Island 5 years later, they were no match for the Sudanese army. However, in 1965 the army was divided between the Free Officers and their supporters, and those who sympathized with the Umma Party stance. As a result, it seems to have intervened little in the crisis.<sup>86</sup>

As the conflict between the pro- and anti-election camps intensified, the British embassy reported the Umma Party secretary general Nugdallah as stating that the party could if it wished mobilize the *Ansar* to provoke violent demonstrations as a pretext for an Umma Party takeover of the government, and that 20,000 *Ansaris* would be brought in from al-Ubayyid and Blue Nile Province to support them.<sup>87</sup> After 6 February, the party did begin to ferry in supporters from the regions. Senior Umma Party member Ahmad al-Mahdi declared that the *Ansar* had come to Khartoum 'not [to commit] any evil or for fighting as some enjoy claiming about them' but 'to support the political position of the Umma Party, and this is a legal and democratic action which it is not in the power of anyone to forbid'.<sup>88</sup> In spite of al-Mahdi's protestations regarding the peaceful intent of the *Ansar*, Howell and Hamid maintain that they were in a 'very bellicose mood'.<sup>89</sup>

The Umma tactic of summoning in thousands of *Ansar* from the countryside to support the party's position highlighted the divisions between the populations of rural Sudan and the urban inhabitants of Khartoum who had made the October Revolution. Ahmad al-Mahdi claimed that the *Ansar* came 'representing millions of citizens in the villages as a result of the statement of the information minister'.<sup>90</sup> An *Ansari* author writing in *al-Nil* welcomed the *Ansar* to 'your capital, which was founded by your fathers and grandfathers', observing 'you are not strangers to Omdurman but you are its people and the people of the country in general'.<sup>91</sup> This was a reference to the role the Mahdist *Ansar* – which had recruited heavily in the rural regions of western Sudan – had played in founding Omdurman following the defeat of the occupying Egyptian army between 1882 and 1885. The mass arrivals from the countryside were thus implicitly represented by the *Ansari* writers as an attempt by the rural population to reclaim the capital from an urban elite that had isolated itself from the rest of Sudan's population. The fact that one of these authors chose to refer pejoratively to Khalafallah Babikir as 'Khalafallah *Effendi*', using the Ottoman term that was associated with both the urban middle class and the Turco-Egyptian regime that had been overthrown by the Mahdists in 1885, indicated the extent to which the *Ansar* were playing on these feelings.

For the left-wing elements within the 'modern forces' in Khartoum, the mobilization of the *Ansar* represented not an expression of rural nationalism but the recrudescence of a dangerously atavistic force that could threaten the progress that urban radicals were hoping to achieve. When bloody clashes had broken out in 1954 between the police and large groups of *Ansar* who had flocked into the capital to protest against the visit

of the Egyptian president Muhammad Najib, the Khartoum newspaper *al-Ra'i al-'Aam* had depicted the *Ansar* as akin to 'Red Indians'.<sup>92</sup> In the final months of 1965, Abd al-Khaliq Mahgub would coin the term 'the violence of the wilderness' (*unf al-badiya*) when referring to the use of the *Ansar* as anti-communist strike-breakers by the then Umma-dominated government.<sup>93</sup> SCP politicians later argued that the Umma's move to bring in its supporters from the regions in February 1965 was intended as a threat to Sirr al-Khatim al-Khalifa and, in effect, constituted an ultimately successful effort to 'bring down the government through violence'.<sup>94</sup> However, the skirmishes that broke out in February between the *Ansar* and large groups of pro-communists from the industrial region of Khartoum paled in comparison to those that would break out towards the end of the year. What they did achieve was to reveal the physical strength of the *Ansar* and the fact that neither the army nor the police were willing to act against them.<sup>95</sup> They also illustrated the failure of a Revolution that had been guided by the 'modern forces' of the cities to incorporate Sudan's rural population into its ideological framework.

The *Ansar* occupation of Khartoum set the stage for the final defeat of the Professional Front at the hands of the Umma, NUP and ICF. While the march from the countryside was proceeding, these parties entered into frequent talks with the prime minister demanding that he reshuffle the cabinet, but were unable to develop any plan that the left would agree too.<sup>96</sup> In the midst of this, Ahmad al-Mahdi made a statement on 16 February insisting that 'although the Umma Party is capable of using force to enforce its demands it would nevertheless resort to peaceful means unless it was forced to the contrary'.<sup>97</sup> The inability to reach an agreement over the formation of the cabinet brought about the collapse of the first interim government, in which the Professional Front ministers were so important, following al-Khalifa's resignation on 19 February 1965.<sup>98</sup>

It has often been claimed, particularly by leftists, that the more conservative political parties forced al-Khalifa to resign,<sup>99</sup> and the evidence for this is indeed strong. Perhaps the clearest indication of their involvement was the fact that while the Professional Front issued statements describing his resignation as unconstitutional, the NUP, Umma and Muslim Brotherhood were the first to hold meetings with him the next day.<sup>100</sup> Sadiq al-Mahdi now acknowledges his own role in arranging the prime minister's temporary resignation, confessing that he played a 'constitutional trick' by agreeing with both Sirr al-Khatim al-Khalifa and Tijani al-Mahi, the head of the Sovereignty Council, that al-Mahi would take over the duties of governing the country for a brief period before re-appointing al-Khalifa and giving him the remit to form a new ministry.<sup>101</sup>

The SCP endeavoured to challenge the formation of the new ministry by launching another general strike, but this time unsuccessfully. It was not carried out fully either in Khartoum or in the other major northern cities, and employers were confident enough to dismiss hundreds of those who did participate.<sup>102</sup> This, in itself, served as a reminder that the SCP and its allies by themselves did not have it within their power to mobilize the entire population of northern Sudan; their relations with the more conservative parties now being strained, they were unable to repeat the feat of 24–26 October. The dismissals of the workers underlined the fact that it was not they, but the professional elite, who had been most empowered by the Revolution.

The new government formed by al-Khalifa did not grant sectoral representation to either the workers or the Gezira tenants, and offered seven ministries to the Umma, NUP and Muslim Brotherhood. Meanwhile, the PDP and SCP initially refused to participate in the cabinet as an objection to the lack of worker representation, thus weakening the position of the leftists and Arab nationalists even further.<sup>103</sup> The second interim government would adopt a fairly conservative set of policies that reflected the nature of its composition, before steering the country towards partial elections in the north on 21 April 1965.

What is significant about the conflicts between the leftist/secularist and more socially conservative elements within the revolutionary front is that the various protagonists continued to employ civil and non-violent methods – media campaigns, negotiations in the transitional cabinet and protests on the street – to wage them. Even the *Ansar* demonstrations, while interpreted by many as a show of force, did not lead to large scale outbreaks of violence. This is where comparisons between the October Revolution and the Iranian Revolution end – while in both cases the protest movements were defined by an ‘ambiguous ideology’ that enabled both leftists and rightists to combine forces in a relatively non-violent struggle against the regime, in the Iranian case, the Islamist factions used far greater violence against their left-wing rivals in the aftermath of the Shah’s downfall.<sup>104</sup> The fact that such an eventuality did not transpire in Sudan once more reflects the cultural homogeneity and social interconnectedness of the political elite, and explains why a transition to a liberal – albeit flawed – democracy, as opposed to a regime more overtly dependent on force, was possible.

## The Native Administration

Part of the reason that the Umma Party was able to mobilize the rural population against the more socially radical urban public and bring down the first interim government was that it had the potential to manipulate networks of patrimonial authority in the Sudanese countryside, which were embedded in the so called ‘Native Administration’. The series of debates that occurred concerning the nature and status of the ‘Native Administration’ (*al-idara al-ahliyya*) following the demise of the November Regime provided another context in which the educated radicals of the northern cities could challenge the more socially conservative forces within the Sudanese political arena – although, as will be demonstrated here, the campaign against this colonial hangover had a far wider base of support than has typically been assumed. The Native Administration was the product of a series of ordinances issued by the British in the 1920s and 1930s, which conferred legal, judicial and administrative authority to rural ‘notables’, such as *Shaikhs*, *Umdas* and southern chiefs.<sup>105</sup> The British had intended that this system would sap the influence of the educated elites of Khartoum and other major northern cities, which represented the core of what was at the time a nascent nationalist movement.<sup>106</sup>

Thus it is unsurprising that in 1964, a cabinet dominated by urban professionals would seek to abolish the Native Administration. Admittedly, it was the SCP that pursued the issue with the greatest alacrity: Shafi’ Ahmad al-Shaikh, the communist



labour minister, was the first to propose dismantling it, on the basis that it was a colonial creation which had been used to subdue the nationalist movement and which had supported Abboud's authoritarian regime.<sup>107</sup> The Native Administration was also particularly odious to the communists because it provided a rural support network for the Umma Party. The SCP was fighting with the Umma for votes in major cotton farming regions such as the Blue Nile and White Nile, where the local tenants mainly came from *Ansari* backgrounds. When the Umma brought *Ansaris* in from these regions in February 1965, the SCP organ *al-Midan* attempted to address them directly, promising that if they allowed the Revolution to continue they would find that they 'will not be coerced by the laws of the Native Administration, and they will find organizations that defend their rights'.<sup>108</sup> The Gezira Tenants' Association, which was directly controlled by the SCP through the party member and government minister Amin Muhammad al-Amin, competed directly with the Umma Party for the support of these *Ansari* cotton labourers. It is therefore unsurprising that one of the reasons this union supported postponement of the elections was so that there could be more time for the government to dismantle the Native Administration.<sup>109</sup> The debate over the Native Administration was directly tied to the SCP's drive to give itself a fighting chance in the upcoming polls.

However, it would be a mistake to associate the campaign against the Native Administration purely with the SCP. The ICF and NUP, although they had opposed the communists' plans to delay the elections, also supported the proposals, because these parties had strong bases of support in the urban areas and wished to remove what they saw as networks supporting the two 'sectarian' parties, the Umma and PDP.<sup>110</sup> Although al-Turabi's NIF would later support the regeneration of the Native Administration system in 1992 – by which time his party had morphed into a mass movement with considerable support in the rural areas – in 1965, his ICF was rooted among the same student groups that sympathized with the SCP and had little interest in preserving the existing social order. As Gallab reminds us, the first generation of communists and Muslim Brothers in Sudan shared the same radical tendency to describe the existing sociopolitical system in Sudan as *taqlidi* (traditional), *taifi* (sectarian) and *mjii* (reactionary).<sup>111</sup> After all, al-Turabi would describe the October Revolution later in 1965 as a 'comprehensive movement which aimed to destroy the existing system of life ... and build a new philosophy'.<sup>112</sup> The judiciary, now headed by the pro-Egyptian radical Babikir Awadallah, also supported the plans to dissolve the Native Administration, demanding that the funds previously allocated to its maintenance be transferred directly to the headquarters of the judiciary so that it could take over its role in administering the law.<sup>113</sup> In other words, adherents of each of the three 'isms' that played such a major part in urban Sudanese intellectual and political life – Arab nationalism, Islamism and communism – supported the campaign against the Native Administration equally.

Sympathy for the plans to dismantle the Native Administration also existed in places farther afield than the developed riverain areas where these 'ideological' parties enjoyed most support. As demonstrated in Chapter 1, while the Revolution had its origins in Khartoum, it found a good deal of support within the provinces. Condemnations of the existing Native Administration system even came from within 'tribal' society itself.

Numerous ethnic groups supported the memorandum of Shafi' Ahmad al-Shaikh, and messages were sent to him on behalf of the Bani Amir and Dungulawiin demanding the removal of their *Nazirs*.<sup>114</sup> Others alleged that the Native Administration had been used by larger 'tribal' units as a means to control less powerful neighbours.<sup>115</sup> The Maaliyya, who wished to secede from the administration of the larger Rizayqat group, were a case in point.<sup>116</sup>

In December 1964, thirty-four members of a group that called itself the 'central committee for the Missiriyya tribes' (*al-lajna al-markaziyya li-qaba'il al-missiriyya*) sent one of the government 'purging committees' (*lijan al-tathir*) a memorandum in which it demanded the removal of the Paramount Nazir of the Missiriyya, Babu Nimr, and a number of other senior Nazirs and members of the Native Administration.<sup>117</sup> The memorandum condemned these men both for their corruption and for their association with the previous regime, informing the minister that 'we have the right as Sudanese to choose who rules us ... it falls to us as a national duty to inform you that the Missiriyya tribes are resolved upon getting rid of these Nazirs whatever it takes'.<sup>118</sup> The local campaigns against the Native Administration revealed just how widespread the influence of the 'Professional Front' was in the 1960s. For instance, a branch of the Professional Front in the Basinda region of Gedaref in eastern Sudan was involved in the campaign against the local Native Administration magnates. Alongside the region's *Umdas*, they attacked the local al-Bakr family for exploiting their influence within the Native Administration 'to the most extreme extent' and maintaining that the land was 'the property of their ancestors by the edge of the sword [i.e. by right of conquest]'.<sup>119</sup> The urban elites thus had a considerable number of local allies in their campaign against the established rural socio-political order.

As seen in Chapter 1, the October Revolution had brought professional bodies into power not just in Khartoum but also in all the major towns of the north. Since the Professional Front had been formed spontaneously and was loose in organization, this offered a great deal of scope for local bodies to exercise genuine self-government. Muhammad Sulayman remembered in 1968 that during the revolutionary period, 'the regions had achieved power and its people were raised to a high level of responsibility in guarding state institutions and foreign possessions and steering the government ... this happened in Madani and al-Ubayyid and Kassala and Dueim and Port Sudan and Kosti and not one criminal incident was recorded throughout the revolutionary period'.<sup>120</sup> While the last statement, in particular, is probably exaggerated, this illustrates that the Revolution did give a brief taste of power to the regional educated elites who would have sympathized little with the Native Administration system.

Spontaneously formed local bodies identified with the nationalist and radical rhetoric coming out of Khartoum and used this rhetoric to mobilize mini-revolts within the provinces against established local authority figures. Most of these local protests did not outline a framework for removing the Native Administration altogether. Nevertheless, the most literate inhabitants of regional towns were prepared to attack the Native Administration quite expansively. Abd al-Hasan Fadl wrote to the regional newspaper *al-Kurdufan* from Nyala that the Native Administration had 'caused backwardness in a number of regions'.<sup>121</sup> Yusuf Ahmad, a student at Khor Togat secondary school in Kordofan attacked the Native Administration for having

'collaborated openly' with the military government and for 'exploiting its judicial and administrative authority to seize the support of the people for the military regime'.<sup>122</sup> The assault on the Native Administration, therefore, while inevitably driven by the agendas of the urban elites in Khartoum, was not simply a top-down process.

On 14 February, just before the first cabinet was dissolved following Sirr al-Khatim al-Khalifa's resignation, it established a committee to decide upon the best means by which to effect the dissolution of the Native Administration.<sup>123</sup> Two days later, members of the cabinet agreed upon the principle of dissolving the Native Administration in Blue Nile Province immediately and setting up committees to investigate the possibility of dismantling it in the other provinces.<sup>124</sup> Although the influence of the leftists within the government declined after the fall of the first cabinet on 19 February, the next cabinet also committed itself to upholding the policies of the previous one regarding the Native Administration.<sup>125</sup> As observed above, this cabinet still contained members of the NUP and ICF, parties that were sympathetic to the abolition of the Native Administration. However, these plans hit a stumbling block when regional administrators in Kordofan and Darfur protested that the removal of the Native Administration would lead to a security vacuum in their regions.<sup>126</sup> Regional security still relied heavily on 'watchmen' (*khufara*) working under the aegis of local Native Administration police forces as opposed to the state judiciary. A survey conducted by one senior administrator in 1965 observed that there were 466 such men in Kordofan, 400 in Blue Nile and 356 in Kassala. The numbers for the southern provinces were even higher.<sup>127</sup> The process of dismantling the Native Administration was put further on hold after the Umma Party won the highest share of the votes in the 1965 elections. The Umma forged a deal with its NUP coalition partner to dissolve the Native Administration only in the most 'advanced' regions, but to 'develop and democratise' it elsewhere.<sup>128</sup>

The debate over the Native Administration illustrates the difficulty associated with defining the October Revolution as a straightforward battle between an urban, progressive left and a rural, religious right. The fact that both the NUP and ICF supported the SCP campaign against the Native Administration, while condemning the party for its secularism and its plans to delay the elections, highlights the difficulty of associating the term 'modern forces' purely with the political left. Moreover, support for the SCP stance also came from within provincial and rural society, reflecting the broad regional impact of the radical and nationalist slogans aroused by the October Revolution – although local campaigns against the Native Administration were often framed with very parochial agendas in mind. As was the case with the electoral law, the overall result was neither a radical new venture nor a total 'abortion of the Revolution', but rather a compromise between the 'modern forces' and the more conservative elements within Sudanese politics.

## Purges and their limitations

Sudanese critics of the October Revolution have often condemned it for giving too much space to left-wing radicals and the SCP in particular to purge competent and much-needed officials from the police and civil service.<sup>129</sup> Abdullahi Ali Ibrahim,



an SCP activist at the time but now an independent Islamist and academic, has denied this and argued that there was much wider support for the measures.<sup>130</sup> He observes that the Umma Party declared their support for the purges on the condition that no injustices should occur, while the Muslim Brotherhood continued to issue statements emphasizing that they had supported the idea of the purge since the very first days of the Revolution.<sup>131</sup> Indeed, the slogan of 'purging' tied in very effectively with Islamist discourses about moral regeneration. The Islamic Socialist Party, another branch of the Muslim Brotherhood active in politics at the time, declared that it was necessary to 'cleanse our society in a complete way'.<sup>132</sup> In October 1965, Hasan al-Turabi recalled that one of the purposes of the Revolution had been to 'cleanse the moral corruption which had become widespread in the administration in terms of bribery and forbidden wealth (*thara' al-haram*)'.<sup>133</sup> The pro-Umma organ *al-Nil* even criticized the information minister Khalafallah Babikir – whom it was used to condemning for his urban radicalism – for his failure to cleanse the ministry of information.<sup>134</sup> It is worth remembering that members of most of the political parties (except the PDP) had been interned during the November Regime and thus bore grudges against it.

The importance attached by the urban radicals to the notion of 'cleansing' further illustrated the manner in which the engineers of the October Revolution conceptualized it as an extension of the struggle for independence. It is worth remembering here that Franz Fanon – whose *Wretched of the Earth* declared that emancipation from colonialism required not just political independence but a complete demolition of the social and political order established by the colonists – was widely read among Khartoum's educated elites at the time.<sup>135</sup> For instance, Sharaf al-Din Abdullah wrote in *al-Nil* in December 1964 that 'the people realized well that independence was not just a flag and decorations and *zagharid* (celebratory ululations)', but that it required achieving tangible goals such as building schools, hospitals and universities – which the colonial administration had failed to do. Abdullah observed that 'colonialism after its departure left behind an administrative apparatus bound to itself ... to achieve its interests...'<sup>136</sup> Thus, the author concluded that more purging would be necessary to 'build the national economy on a socialist basis'.<sup>137</sup> In a similar fashion, Abd al-Khaliq Mahgub declared that the administration had been appointed mainly by the British and that cleansing was thus 'a completion of national liberation'.<sup>138</sup> This was one of the reasons that support for the purges extended beyond the SCP – even its SCP advocates propagandized it as a means to achieve national emancipation, rather than to pursue class conflict.

The 'cleansing' of the government apparatus was not driven simply by the agendas of a small elite in Khartoum. Chants such as 'purging is a national duty' and 'revenge, revenge against the butchers' were sung by crowds from Khartoum to Hassaheissa to Port Sudan.<sup>139</sup> Individual citizens would write letters supported by documents and other forms of evidence to government committees.<sup>140</sup> Delegations came from towns outside Khartoum such as New Halfa to insist that committees be set up to investigate corrupt acts for which the previous government had been responsible.<sup>141</sup> As seen above, even citizens from relatively peripheral areas of northern Sudan would use the 'cleansing committees' as a means to conduct their campaign against local Native Administrations.

Was the process fair? Ibrahim has also defended the transitional government on this count, maintaining that the investigation committees that were established scrutinized every individual claim of corruption thoroughly before axes fell on heads. These investigations involved, for instance, field research trips to provincial towns.<sup>142</sup> Nevertheless, reports on the trials and investigations are so full of accusations of personal grudges and political agendas biasing the process that it is difficult for the historian to make any confident and objective judgement on how reasonable it was. The fact that the minister charged with overseeing the 'cleansing committee' was Ahmad Sulayman, an SCP man, would have raised expectations that aggressive measures would be taken against officials of the former government.<sup>143</sup> However, as noted above, Ahmad Sulayman was a political pragmatist. He even made sure to inform the British Ambassador in early December that he did not intend to conduct any purging in his own department.<sup>144</sup>

The transitional government did find it necessary to sacrifice some officials to appease the clamouring public. Even before it did, a number of prominent public servants resigned pre-emptively to save face. The Chief Justice, Abu Rannat, fell on his sword along with his deputy Mahgub Hussein and was replaced by the radical Babikir Awadallah, who had been at the forefront of the judges' protest.<sup>145</sup> The permanent under-secretary at the ministry of foreign affairs left his position in the same manner.<sup>146</sup> The committee also purged the permanent under-secretary at the ministry of interior, and four leading officials in the ministry of irrigation, while three top men in the ministry of animal resources and two senior diplomats including the representative to New York were retired on pension.<sup>147</sup> The ministers in charge of the interior, irrigation, animal resources and foreign ministries represented the Southern Front, PDP, Muslim Brotherhood and Umma, respectively – which would again seem to challenge the notion that 'purging' was the exclusive prerogative of the political left. The Ba'athist Shawgi Mallasi, who served on the 'cleansing committee', maintains that 'the source of the injustice and the extremism' was not Ahmad Sulayman, but Muhammad Salih Umar, the Muslim Brotherhood representative.<sup>148</sup> This further demonstrates that the rift between 'progressives' and 'conservatives' was not as comprehensive as is often assumed.

These limited measures represented a symbolic effort to remove the talismans of the old regime, rather than a root-and-branch expurgation of government malpractice. The transitional government's reluctance to punish the widespread forms of corruption practised under the rule of its military predecessor was illustrated by its lenient attitude towards newspapers that had taken money from Abboud's government. Although a committee was established under Khalafallah Babikir to purge the press, it failed to commit itself to any punitive measures.<sup>149</sup> This was in spite of the fact that this committee announced on 3 December 1964 that the former government had dispensed over 10,000 Sudanese pounds to various journalists to give favourable coverage of government policy and that a number of these funds had been distributed to private accounts.<sup>150</sup> Media organs that had been banned under the November Regime, such as *al-Nil*, *Sudan al-Jadid* and *al-Midan* were all quick to encourage action to be taken against those newspapers that they perceived as having supported it. Both *al-Midan* and *Sudan al-Jadid* made demands that the committee publish a list known to be in its

possession of journalists who had taken funds from the Novemberists.<sup>151</sup> Eventually, *al-Midan* managed to obtain a copy of the list and print it for the public to see, much to the frustration of the committee.<sup>152</sup> However, even this revelation did not lead to any journalists being sanctioned, probably reflecting the fact that they had chosen 'the side of the angels'<sup>153</sup> after the success of the Revolution.

The transitional government also failed to achieve justice for those who had been the victims of government brutality during Abboud's period. Mustafa Hassanain, the young communist whose alleged torture had led to the FOP protests against the Abboud Regime in 1961, attempted to press charges against a number of military personnel, but the new Chief Justice was unable to go ahead because he was unable to find any papers relating to the case.<sup>154</sup> Courts were established in the south to investigate cases of torture committed against southerners by the northern security forces, but were dissolved following protests from the Professional Front and from northern policemen serving in the south.<sup>155</sup> This was further evidence of the Khartoum professionals' radicalism being constrained by their regional bias.

The Professional Front insisted that instead of holding individual soldiers or policemen responsible for atrocities committed in the south, the interim government should consider the SCAF generals to be ultimately responsible for the government's acts in the region and try them instead.<sup>156</sup> The cabinet appears to have taken the same attitude, which further illustrated that the regime had focused on a policy of targeting top-ranking individuals rather than endeavouring to remedy the brutalities and corruption of the authoritarian system in a systematic fashion. It probably treated the former SCAF strongmen more harshly than any other figures associated with the government during this period. The interim government interned them in Zalingei in western Sudan, which hardly represented a cushy option.<sup>157</sup>

The eventual decision to try the former SCAF members did, in itself, represent a radical move. It divided members of the provisional cabinet, given that it involved rewriting the interim constitution, which had included guarantees that these men would be exempt from trial.<sup>158</sup> Criminal proceedings were initiated against them in February 1965 under articles 96–98 of the Sudan Penal Code, on charges of, among other things, mutiny and inciting war against the government.<sup>159</sup> However, the trials dragged on and the democratic government that emerged following the April elections did not take a sympathetic attitude towards the decision to violate the provisions of the interim constitution in bringing them to trial.<sup>160</sup> Ultimately, all that was achieved during the second democratic regime was the promulgation of a 'political isolation' law in late 1965, which banned senior members of the November Regime from participating in public life for a period of 5 years.<sup>161</sup> This had a relatively significant impact. Although the civilian Finance Minister Mamoun Biheiri returned to the same post during Nimeiri's May Regime, none of the former SCAF members ever returned to government office after 1964.

The one member of the SCAF who received lenient treatment was Ibrahim Abboud himself. The day after he stepped down as head of state, Khalafallah Babikir declared that he would have freedom to travel wherever he wished, and the former president was even given a small financial reward to help him retire.<sup>162</sup> This perhaps signalled the transitional government's gratitude towards Abboud for the relatively obliging manner



in which he had conceded to the pro-democracy protests. It also illustrated one of the most important truths regarding the entire transitional experience, which was that it was driven by a group of professionals who were happy to remove their immediate political enemies but had little interest in imposing the kind of extreme punishments that might radicalize the existing political and social order, as, say, the killings of Nuri al-Sa'id and Faisal II had in Iraq in 1958. The purges were partly generational, as senior civil servants associated with the colonial order were targeted and removed, and in this sense they fulfilled the conditions of a Fanon-esque 'cleansing' of the past. However, since the majority of government servants came from the same regional, social and ethnic backgrounds as those who had led the Revolution and served in the transitional government, it is unsurprising that these purges were not systematic in nature. The vision of a purified government, cleansed of its sins by representatives of the society it had oppressed, proved to be elusive.

### The 'Southern Problem'

The October Revolution stimulated images of a nation that was not just morally and socially cleansed, but also socially and culturally united. Such was the sense of national positivity brought about by the Revolution that it offered somewhat illusory hopes for the potential future unity of the Sudanese nation, at least to northerners. The initial sense of elation created by the downfall of the military government inspired the belief that north and south could be reconciled just as right and left, or military and civil, could be. The PDP even suggested repatriating the body of Ali Abd al-Latif from Cairo to Khartoum, declaring that the half-Dinka leader of the proto-nationalist White Flag Revolt of 1924 could be used as a symbol to entice southerners back into the national fold.<sup>163</sup>

While they did not contribute notably to the Revolution itself, the southerners of the capital responded quickly to the new political environment by establishing a 'Southern Front' on 30 October, which was acknowledged by the UNF and tasked with electing southern representatives in the national government.<sup>164</sup> Both the representatives whom they elected to the cabinet were well known for their open opposition to the military's aggressive policy in the south.<sup>165</sup> That al-Khalifa was able to incorporate such men into his cabinet seemed to demonstrate a commitment towards dealing with the problematic relationship between north and south, particularly since Clement Mboro was awarded the crucial position of minister of interior. Mboro utilized his position to release twenty-eight southern political prisoners, and to offer a general amnesty to all those bearing arms in the south.<sup>166</sup> In a speech in Wau in late November, he spoke angrily about the crimes committed by the military regime in the region, promising that they would be investigated and the perpetrators punished.<sup>167</sup> The fact that Mboro was voicing this agenda as the representative of a Khartoum-based government seemed to offer hopes of significant progress in relations between north and south.

The 'Black Sunday' events of 6 December 1964 would undermine hopes for a resolution to the southern conflict. Clement Mboro proved to be the central figure as southerners awaiting the arrival of his plane into Khartoum airport sparked angry

demonstrations following a lengthy delay, which had generated rumours that the minister had been assassinated by the army.<sup>168</sup> The riots that subsequently broke out between northerners and southerners in Khartoum illustrated well what Simone describes as the wars in the marginalized peripheries coming 'back to haunt' the riverain elite of the urban towns.<sup>169</sup> Hamad argues that the southerners who sparked off the tumult were recent migrants from the war-affected region.<sup>170</sup> Reportedly, nine southerners were killed, alongside four northerners and a Greek.<sup>171</sup>

It is ironic that the civil war should have come back to haunt Khartoum at this time, given that the capital itself had been free of conflict during the military campaign waged by the November Regime in the south in the years prior to the Revolution. While the new possibilities offered by the Revolution had raised hopes of unity, they had also provoked the fears of the Sudanese who did not believe that northerners and southerners could work together in a government without prejudicing each other's interests. In particular, the events exposed the tension that had been generated within the ministry of interior as a result of Mboro's appointment. Mboro had purged two senior northern police officials, and former policemen claim that he bore grudges against others.<sup>172</sup> The resultant state of discontent massively undermined the operational efficiency of the force, and probably explains its paralytic reaction to the inter-ethnic violence between northerners and southerners.<sup>173</sup>

On the surface of it, the Black Sunday events did not create an immediate rift between northern and southern politicians. Both the government and the regional as well as local Arabic-language press attributed the riots to unseen 'foreign agents' and 'colonial conspiracies' aimed at fomenting disunity within Sudan.<sup>174</sup> However, in practice, the riots had created new divides in addition to exposing old ones. Two months later, Luigi Adwok, the only southern member on the Council of State, informed the British Ambassador that he had lost a brother in the riots, in addition to one other who had perished in the fighting in the south. Adwok reportedly stated that he wished he had been fighting alongside the southern rebels himself.<sup>175</sup> Meanwhile, northerners began to display an increasing distrust towards southern officials working in the government. Northern officials and northern journalists began to accuse them – and particularly those who were transferred back to the south from the north as a result of pressure from the Southern Front – of working to assist the rebel movement.<sup>176</sup> *Al-Ayyam* asserted in January 1965 that a 'major [southern] official' in Khartoum had been implicated in passing on information to the rebels, telling them not to lay down their arms but to prepare for further conflict.<sup>177</sup>

The rebels' refusal to lay down arms was a significant factor in the failure of northern and southern politicians to come to terms. It caused northern parties to reject the idea of holding the much mooted 'round table' conference in the south itself on security grounds, thus undermining the whole legitimacy of the process for the southerners themselves.<sup>178</sup> When the conference was eventually held in Khartoum, the leadership of the major southern political movement, the Sudan African Nationalist Union (SANU), could not offer a united position, being divided between those who favoured self-determination for the south and those who accepted the idea of a potential federation with the north.<sup>179</sup> However, it would be injudicious to blame the southerners themselves for the failure of the conference. As we have seen, the political debates that ignited the

October Revolution had never evinced a serious commitment among the northern educated elite to engage with the 'southern problem'. When the round table conference did occur, it was the intransigent attitude of the northern political parties towards any notion of either self-determination or federalism that stymied any potential for a negotiated solution to the conflict.<sup>130</sup> This further demonstrates the regional bias of the Revolution's principal northern protagonists.

### A radical new foreign policy?

A cursory analysis of Sudan's foreign policy during the 1964–5 interim period might result in the same binary approach that has emerged in the understanding of the transitional period in general. The 'radical' forces who had taken control of the first interim cabinet produced a more 'left wing' foreign policy, whereas the 'traditional' forces that seized the second interim cabinet and then the post-election parliamentary governments reversed it and applied more 'conservative' policies. There is, naturally, a great deal of truth in such observations. The first interim cabinet was genuinely more radical than those that preceded it. As Hamid and Howell, who conducted research on Sudan's foreign policy immediately after the Revolution, observe, 'with power now in the hands of urban and intellectual groups, the Sudan was bound to move left anyway, and in the new political climate, a fresh approach to foreign policy was inevitable'.<sup>131</sup>

The new government was quick to confront what it saw as Western Imperialism, immediately refusing British aircraft carrying military aid to British forces in Aden access to Sudanese airports.<sup>132</sup> However, the clearest evidence of Sudan's newly radicalized foreign policy was its support of Lumumbist rebels who were fighting the Western-backed forces of Moïse Tshombe in Eastern Congo. The October Revolution occurred at a time when this conflict had reached a particularly critical juncture – in November 1964, Tshombe's troops captured Stanleyville with the support of US and Belgian troops, provoking widespread resentment of what was perceived to be a neo-colonial intervention.<sup>133</sup> The new Sudanese government, with support from the Algerian and Egyptian regimes, was quick to intervene in favour of the Lumumbist factions. In December, twelve aircraft passed through Khartoum airport bearing arms for the rebels from Algeria and Egypt. *The Times* reported that Sudan was using its southern region to play host to the rebel leader Christopher Mbenye, and facilitating Algerian and Egyptian military training of rebel troops.<sup>134</sup> The interim foreign minister, Muḥammad Aḥmad Maḥgub, insisted that his government was providing only medical and economic, as opposed to military, aid.<sup>135</sup> However, former Professional Front members have since acknowledged their role in assisting the arms transfer.<sup>136</sup> Predictably, once the second interim cabinet took over in February, and was replaced by a parliamentary regime following the April elections, this military support trickled to a halt.<sup>137</sup>

However, the interim government's policy was not as radical as it might have been, given the presence of three SCP members in the cabinet. At no point did it openly espouse Marxism or champion the Russian and Chinese Revolutions. On taking office on 1 November, Sirr al-Khatīm al-Khalifa declared that his government 'would support



non-alignment and principles laid down at the Arab and African summit conferences this year'.<sup>188</sup> His regime broadly adhered to this statement. In spite of rumours that the Professional Front was receiving funding from Eastern Bloc Embassies,<sup>189</sup> its main dealings in this period were with African and Arab nationalist regimes or rebel groups in Egypt, Yemen, Algeria, Congo, Ethiopia and Chad.

Furthermore, it might be observed that none of the interim regime's foreign policy manoeuvres were inspired by the leftists within the National Front. Its policies towards the Eritrean rebels and Chadian rebels, although more vigorous, were to some extent consistent with the outlooks of the regimes that preceded and followed it. Although Howell and Hamid emphasize the interim regime's role in backing rebels in Chad and Ethiopia, Ibrahim observes that the Public Security division within the police had been forging contacts with both these rebel movements since the early 1960s, under Abboud's regime.<sup>190</sup> Both the Chadian and Eritrean rebel movements were largely Muslim in countries with Christian-dominated governments. It appears that of all the parties that participated in the interim regime, it was the Islamic Charter Front that provided the most significant support to the Chadian rebels. They formed a group that called itself 'the Islamic Republic of Chad in Exile', and began to publish in the ICF's newspaper, *al-Mithaq*.<sup>191</sup> The worst conflicts with Ethiopia over the exiled Eritrean rebel leaders, which involved a number of assassination attempts on dissident Eritreans in Khartoum and Kassala, came in April and May – by which time the 'radical' first cabinet had disappeared.<sup>192</sup>

Moreover, in spite of the fact that the transitional government had hampered the former colonizer's campaign in Aden, British diplomatic personnel were objective enough to not view the campaign simply in the light of the Cold War. In fact, the British Ambassador criticized the American representative for doing so, and for planning to provide financial support for the Umma Party so as to use them as a counter-weight against any potential communist takeover. The British Ambassador lamented on 23 December 1964 that 'it is discouraging that a responsible official in Washington should see things in terms of black and white, when they are the usual infinite variety of dirty shades of grey'.<sup>193</sup> As seen above, the Umma-affiliated foreign minister, Muhammad Ahmad Mahgub, was quick to reassure the British that his colleague Ahmad Sulayman was a communist 'only in name'. The British were clearly not frightened enough of the 'reds' in the interim cabinet to defer the Queen's official visit in February 1965 – and this decision was perhaps justified when Ahmad Sulayman reportedly brought laughter from Elizabeth II by introducing himself as a member of 'your Majesty's loyal Communist Party'.<sup>194</sup>

## Conclusion

The political challenges of the transitional period exposed the fault lines within the Sudanese body politic that had been hidden by the Revolution itself. However, these fault lines cannot be defined with the ease that one might imagine. There was no Manichaean conflict between a religious, conservative right and an urban, progressive left. Up until the political crisis triggered by the role of the SCP during the 'Night of

the Barricades', individuals of all party persuasions within the 'modern forces' had campaigned together against the perceived efforts to restore the older order. The fact that most of the branches of the 'modern forces' – including the students, the professionals and the radical young generation of army officers – hailed mainly from the same homogeneous northern riverain social backgrounds helped for a while to reduce the effects of ideological cleavages. There was no single issue in 1964 that divided the religious and the secular parties as much as the issue of the September Laws would in 1985 – the various parties did share disagreements over the matter of an Islamic constitution, but since no system of Islamic law was in place at the time, the matter could be left till the post-election period to be discussed.

Different parties adopted different stances on different issues and brokered separate alliances to back up their positions. While the NUP and ICF saw it in their interest to oppose the SCP's proposals on the timing and structure of the electoral process, they actually supported the SCP line in other regards. The slogan of 'purging' fitted in just as well with Islamist morality tales as it did with the SCP desire to bring in a new, socialist order or the wider nationalist project to distance those perceived to be remnants of the colonial system. The fact that the ICF and NUP, both of which appealed to urban constituencies, advocated the dissolution of the Native Administration illustrated that radical social agendas were not purely the prerogative of the left. Meanwhile, the PDP, in spite of the fact that it relied heavily on the support of conservative rural social groups adhering to its religio-political backers in the Khatmiyya order, embraced the 'modern forces' and supported SCP proposals to delay elections and allocate seats to workers.

If we are to attribute reasons for the various crises of the transitional regime, perhaps it is the divide between urban and rural, and between Sudan's 'centres' and 'peripheries', that offers the greatest explanatory value. It is true that the slogans of the October Revolution generated some degree of change within provincial society, this change being driven along by local professional elites and those who were discontented with the existing social order. Nevertheless, it is important to understand that the urban radicals who led the Revolution failed to associate the majority of the rural populace with their agenda. This enabled the Umma Party to introduce an alternative vision of Sudanese nationalism and, indeed, the Revolution itself, so as to mobilize its rural *Ansari* support base. While the Umma Party's *Ansari* followers had not played a crucial role in the decisive events of October, their mass migration to Khartoum in February altered the character of what had previously been an urban revolution.

In particular, the urban radicals failed to offer a revolutionary vision that appealed sufficiently to the inhabitants of the southern periphery. The very fact that Khartoum's southerners constituted a Southern Front, implicitly separate from both the UNF and Professional Front, illustrated the social and regional limitations of the institutions associated with the October Revolution. The appointment of outspoken southern politicians to cabinet positions was evidence of the liberal intent of the transitional regime, but the wide gap between negotiating positions at the round table conference of March 1965 demonstrated that the northern elite was still incapable of offering compromises that would satisfy southern aspirations. The limited regional and social roots of the October Revolution had ensured that it would be unable to transform its slogans into reality.

## The 1985–6 Transitional Period and the Tenacity of Political Islam

Just as 'progressive' Sudanese intellectuals in 1964 claimed that the October Revolution had been aborted by the 'traditional' forces spearheaded by the Umma Party, so in 1985 the leftists and liberals of the National Alliance would accuse Hasan al-Turabi's National Islamic Front (NIF) – a revamped version of the ICF – of conspiring to undermine the achievements of the April *Intifada*. The army leadership, which temporarily seized executive power with the formation of the Transitional Military Council (TMC) on 9 April, is frequently accused of having collaborated with the NIF to prevent it from achieving its goals. It is often claimed that the NIF controlled the interim government by remote control through 'satellites' such as Siwar al-Dahab and Taj al-Din Fadl in the TMC, and Jizouli Dafa'allah, Hussein Abu Salih and Umar Abd al-Ati in the interim cabinet. The problem with such claims is that they tend to downplay the institutional agendas of the military leadership and identify 'Islamists' as a single category, thus denying the capacity of the non-Turabist Islamists – who also joined the Alliance and then the transitional government – to identify with ideals such as democracy and liberalism. It will be seen below that the divisions between the secularists and anti-secularists within the Alliance played a significant role in preventing it from achieving its goals, although these divisions revealed a far more complex set of relationships than is supposed by those who assert that Siwar al-Dahab and Jizouli Dafa'allah were mere 'satellites' of the NIF.

### Divisions within the National Alliance

The differences within the pro-democracy movement were more immediately visible in 1985 than had been the case in 1964. Since Nimeiri's downfall had been relatively predictable, it did not have the same unifying effect that the October Revolution did. Moreover, as Woodward observes, the fact that the same political groups that participated in 1985 had also witnessed 1964 meant that they came prepared to act in different ways.<sup>1</sup> They had learnt from the crises that followed the first uprising and pursued strategies based on an anticipation of the recurrence of similar conflicts. There were disputes between the army and the unions, the unions and the parties, the secularists and the Islamists and between Alliance members of individual political convictions.



The first divergence that emerged was within the National Alliance, between the parties and the professional unions. Some professionals had not wanted to contact the parties at all – Jizouli Dafaallah, who was in prison at the time Amin Makki Madani took the decision to invite the parties into the Alliance, maintains that if he had been free at that stage he would have opposed the decision.<sup>2</sup> The professional unions had learnt during 1964–5 that a swift return to electoral democracy would cause their influence to disappear rapidly. Meanwhile, the leaderships of the traditional parties remained confident of their ability to manipulate the rural vote, and balanced the need to focus on rebuilding their organization within Sudan against the fear that a government composed of the ‘modern forces’ would use a lengthy period of transition to alter Sudan’s legal, governmental and electoral framework so as to favour urban, educated groups.

These disputes came to the fore at the first serious meeting between the parties and the professional unions on 5 April, before the May Regime had even departed. Reportedly, this meeting was a heated one and broke up without a date being set to reconvene and with a large number of problems unresolved.<sup>3</sup> One of the most vociferously contested issues was that of the length of the transitional period. Representatives of the professional unions demanded that it be 5 years, insisting that this was necessary to remove all the negative manifestations of the old regime and ‘create the basis for a liberal and united Sudan’.<sup>4</sup> Party representatives objected to this and haggled until the union representatives agreed to reduce the number to 3 years.<sup>5</sup> As in 1964, therefore, the internal contradictions of the pro-democracy coalition were evident. Having brought about the downfall of Nimeiri’s dictatorial regime and facilitated the return of democracy, the ‘modern forces’ sought to delay its onset for as long as possible.

Meanwhile, the union representatives proposed a tripartite system of governance incorporating a cabinet, a ‘council of the unions’ (*majlis al-niqabi*), and a five-man sovereignty council incorporating one union representative, three members of the major northern political parties (without the ICF/NIF), and one southerner. Meanwhile, 60 per cent of the cabinet would be appointed by the professional and trade union leaderships and 40 per cent by the parties, while the reverse would apply for the *majlis al-niqabi*.<sup>6</sup> It appears that this was also rejected by the party representatives.

Siwar al-Dahab’s declaration on 6 April thrust the military into the midst of the party-professional conflict, weakening the position of the professionals. After his speech was broadcast, the professional leaders discovered to their frustration that the representatives of the DUP and the Umma had neglected their previously arranged meeting with them so as to visit the army leadership and give their blessing to what the military had done!<sup>7</sup> The commander-in-chief’s intervention put the professionals under pressure to make decisions before they had the chance to forge proper links with the labour unions.<sup>8</sup> An attempt by Muhammad al-Amin al-Tom to arrange a meeting between the professional and labour unions at this point was thwarted by the appearance of union leaders affiliated with the SSU.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, the army put the unions under pressure to end the general strike immediately, sending Colonel Abd al-Aziz al-Amin to remind the Alliance leaders of the deteriorating economic situation and dispatching units to the headquarters of the electricity board to demand cancellation of the blackout.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, labour and professional activists attempted to mobilize the public to prevent any further intervention. On 8 April the professional

unions, led by the cashiers, launched a demonstration joined by student and workers' bodies demanding that the army surrender power, and chanting slogans like 'there is no substitute for the government of the people'.<sup>11</sup>

It is important to understand, therefore, that the conflict between the government and the civilian demonstrators did not end with the army takeover of 6 April. As seen in Chapter 4, the leaderships of the labour unions did not officially enter the *Intifada* until shortly after Siwar al-Dahab's declaration that the army was 'siding with the people', and their entry gave the demonstrations a new impetus. Leftists claim that these demonstrations, which had the support of the Free Officer Organization, were what forced the regime to dismantle the SSO and arrest all the leading figures in the former regime, who had up to this point been allowed to walk in the streets unmolested.<sup>12</sup> It was also the urban crowds who broke down the gates of Kober prison with a lorry and released all the political prisoners from the May period.<sup>13</sup> The army leadership had initially given no orders for these men, a great number of whom were leftists and Baathists, to be released.<sup>14</sup> Although it later acknowledged their freedom when it had been brought about *de facto*, critics of the army have even maintained that Fadlallah Burna Nasir, one of the regional commanders, attempted to intervene and prevent some of the political prisoners from being released.<sup>15</sup> This indicates that there was an 'uprising within an uprising' between 6 and 8 April, in which the more left-wing political forces pressured the army leadership to take a radical position. However, the problem for these left-wing groups within the National Alliance was that the relative spontaneity of the uprising had prevented them from gaining sufficient time to coordinate fully with the Free Officer movement in the army and to establish a coherent political programme.<sup>16</sup> The takeover of the army leadership on 6 April had thus come at precisely the wrong time for these groups.

It seems that the attitude of the army leadership towards the unions was unsympathetic from the outset. 'Right from the beginning they [the union leaders] were not happy', declares Siwar al-Dahab, 'they thought we should go we should go back to the barracks, in fact at that time they tried to go on demonstrating, we threatened them that if they don't calm down we are going to face them with harsh and tough measures'.<sup>17</sup> Alliance leaders allege that the military intimidated them directly in meetings held before the cancellation of the general strike.<sup>18</sup> At the same time, the army's insistence that the strike be terminated appears to have been one of many issues exposing divisions among the unions themselves. Eventually, the less radical faction prevailed and it was called off.<sup>19</sup> The emergence of the military also thwarted the professionals' plans to demand a longer transitional period, and the party representatives were thus able to impose a one-year arrangement on the unions; this was agreed upon at a meeting between the Alliance and TMC on 9 April.<sup>20</sup> Siwar al-Dahab's swift announcement of the military takeover thus significantly undermined the position of the urban radicals.

It was the divisions within the Alliance leadership that provided the context for the soldiers displacing them as interim leaders. After the abandonment of the general strike, the various factions within the Alliance held another meeting on 9 April; in this they found themselves still unable to reach an agreement on governing arrangements for the transitional period.<sup>21</sup> These divisions appear to have been ideological in nature. While most of the professionals' leaders within the Alliance did not possess open political affiliations, they did hold either strongly leftist or pro-Islamist convictions.

Adlan Hardallo and Awad al-Karim Muhammad Ahmad fell within the former category, and Jizouli Dafa'allah, Mirghani al-Nasri and Umar Abd al-Ati in the latter.<sup>22</sup> It was the debate over the status of *shari'a* law that provoked Jizouli Dafa'allah to storm out of the 9 April meeting, threatening to resign his position in the Alliance.<sup>23</sup> Alliance members recall that it was in this heated session that they were surprised by the news of the army leadership's decision to establish a Transitional Military Council and take over the government.<sup>24</sup> This illustrates the manner in which the inability of the Alliance leaders to forge a common position left them vulnerable to an impatient and untrusting military.

The decision to establish the TMC was taken without any consultation with the civilians.<sup>25</sup> Siwar al-Dahab is now quite unapologetic about his failure to inform the Alliance of its formation in advance, insisting that it was 'a military body and they don't have any say in composing that council'.<sup>26</sup> However, what is unclear is whether the military was exploiting divisions within the Alliance as a result of its own desire to seize power, or simply reacting to the failures of the Alliance to decide on an effective system of governance. Haydar Taha claims that during the first meeting between the Alliance leaders and the TMC following the removal of Nimeiri, Mirghani al-Nasri demanded that the army surrender power to the Alliance. Siwar al-Dahab reportedly asked him, 'are you ready?', which apparently prompted al-Nasri to turn around, scrutinize his delegation, and then, having observed that they were all very young, report 'no we are not ready'.<sup>27</sup> This story may well have been embellished, exaggerated, or even fabricated outright, but it does reflect the more widespread concerns at the time concerning the potential effectiveness of the Alliance as a governing body. Umar al-Digeir, who was present at the meeting, provides a similar account, asserting that Siwar al-Dahab offered to surrender power to the National Alliance immediately but that not even a single member of its delegation responded to his invitation.<sup>28</sup>

The decision to form the TMC was quickly accepted by the DUP, the Umma Party, and Sadiq Abdullah's wing of the Muslim Brotherhood, but resented by the less conservative factions within the Alliance.<sup>29</sup> Although anger at the decision of the army leadership to take power unilaterally united the professionals in the Alliance, it did so only temporarily. While they were furious at the TMC, they still could not agree with the parties on the nature of any substitute for it.<sup>30</sup> The debate over the selection of the interim prime minister also revealed the weak position of the radical faction among the professionals. Both the individuals proposed by the Alliance for the post of prime minister, Jizouli Dafa'allah and Mirghani al-Nasri, were known for their pro-Islamist convictions and were reported to have the backing of the Umma and the DUP.<sup>31</sup> This probably signalled the acceptance by the leftists within the Alliance of their inability to influence the military leadership. While a number of the members of the Khartoum University Teachers' Union mooted the left-leaning Adlan Hardallo as a candidate for the post of prime minister, Hardallo himself declined to accept the nomination. He claims to have felt that after the formation of the TMC, things were not going as the Alliance wanted and that he would have been powerless to change the policies of the military, although the fact that he had been labelled a communist meant that he would most likely have been rejected for the post in any case.<sup>32</sup>

Nevertheless, a lengthy series of debates emerged within the Alliance as to whether Jizouli Dafa'allah or Mirghani al-Nasri was the fitter candidate for the position.<sup>33</sup>



It appears that Mahgub Uthman, the Sudan Communist Party representative, objected to Mirghani al-Nasri's candidature on account of the latter being a member of the Islamic Socialist Party.<sup>34</sup> However, this also appears to have been very much a clash of personal attitudes between their respective supporters, and Jizouli Dafa'Allah was eventually selected.<sup>35</sup> Frustrated by his rejection, Mirghani al-Nasri refused to play any further role in the transitional government. Personal competition, apart from ideological conflict, thus made its own contribution to undermining the Alliance.

The selection of the fifteen cabinet members also provoked conflict. Admittedly, this process was not as contentious as it could have been had the political parties not decided to refrain from participation in the transitional government and focus on rebuilding their infrastructural strength after 16 years without multi-party elections. Alliance members agreed that while no candidate would be permitted to have any open political affiliation, both the parties and the unions would have a say in nominating individual members.<sup>36</sup> A motion by leftist members of the Alliance that unions and professional associations should be allowed directly to nominate their own representatives for the ministries was narrowly defeated.<sup>37</sup> The decision-makers within the Alliance felt that the fact that there was a considerably greater number of both parties and unions than had existed in 1964 made their direct representation in the transitional cabinet impractical.<sup>38</sup>

Nevertheless, it appears that a few of the ministers did possess close links to the political parties, specifically the religious parties. The health minister and member of the Doctors' Union Hussein Abu Salih ran successfully for parliament towards the end of the interim period on behalf of the DUP.<sup>39</sup> According to *Africa Confidential*, he had also been a member of the Muslim Brotherhood as a student.<sup>40</sup> Meanwhile, education minister Bashir Haj al-Tom was allegedly a member of Sadiq Abdullah's Muslim Brotherhood party, a splinter group within the wider Islamic movement.<sup>41</sup> Leftist sources also allege that the foreign minister, Ibrahim Taha Ayoub, was 'an extreme Islamist'.<sup>42</sup> Again, these appointments seem to have been a source of friction for leftists within the National Alliance. Awad al-Karim Muhammad Ahmad declared, in vain, his opposition to the list of ministerial nominations presented to, and eventually accepted by, the TMC.<sup>43</sup> This reminds us that, in spite of the refusal of the ICF to participate in the Alliance, the professional movement forming the interim regime still incorporated a large number of non-Turabist Islamists. This category was probably over-represented in the interim cabinet because of the TMC's anti-Ba'athist and anti-leftist stance. The only transitional ministers other than the prime minister who had participated in the *Intifada* were those who had been in contact with the more conservative branches of the Umma and DUP – Amin Makki Madani and (according to some accounts) Umar Abd al-Ati.<sup>44</sup>

### Islamist links to the TMC and cabinet

The fact that the transitional cabinet incorporated so many individuals tending towards political Islam led secularists within the Alliance to insist that they were collaborators of al-Turabi. Such arguments reflect a wider discourse suggesting that – as in 1964 – the *Intifada* was stolen by the religious-political right. Claims were made during and

after the transitional period by individuals on both the political left and the political right that al-Turabi's NIF were manipulating or even directly controlling the leaders of the TMC and cabinet. Such claims have easily elided with the proposition that Siwar al-Dahab's regime was 'May 2', since the NIF – although it was formed from the core of the old ICF – also incorporated a number of members of Nimeiri's political and security establishment who were seeking new allies after the downfall of the regime.<sup>45</sup> Adlan Hardallo maintained in 1987, and still does maintain, that Siwar al-Dahab, Jizouli Dafa'allah and Taj al-Din Fadl were 'members of the Muslim Brotherhood'.<sup>46</sup> Such men have thus become scapegoats for the failure of the transitional period and the slide towards Umar al-Bashir's pro-NIF coup in 1989. Al-Turabi himself claimed at the time that these three men, in addition to Hussein Abu Salih, were all Islamists and ensured that the NIF view was being represented in the cabinet.<sup>47</sup>

The truth is somewhat more nuanced. For instance, Jizouli Dafa'allah himself maintains 'I am an Islamist not belonging to a party ... we have the same sort of aspirations, but if he [al-Turabi] means by Islamist that I belong to his party, he is wrong. But al-Turabi was a friend, and we still keep good contact.'<sup>48</sup> This reminds us of the tenacity of the social links binding together the professional elite, just as much as the similar ideological proclivities of the two men. It is true that Jizouli Dafa'allah *had* been a member of the Muslim Brotherhood, joining it during his secondary education at Hantoub. He had also succeeded al-Turabi as the leader of the Brotherhood's political office at the University of Khartoum between 1957 and 1959.<sup>49</sup> However, in 1964, just as al-Turabi was changing the course of the Islamic Movement with the formation of the Islamic Charter Front, Jizouli Dafa'allah renounced his political ties and left the organization.<sup>50</sup> Explaining this, he observes: 'I think I was too independent for an organization.'<sup>51</sup> Thus, while he was an Islamist, he had never joined any party led by al-Turabi or espousing a Turabist ideology. Moreover, he continued to participate in the Alliance at a time when it was shunning any links with the NIF. In this context, it is worth bearing in mind that at the time he was leading the doctors' strike in 1984, the ICF managed to isolate itself from the unions because of its refusal to support their demands for increased pay.<sup>52</sup>

It could also be argued that the military and Alliance leaderships selected Jizouli Dafa'allah not just for his ideological background, but also for his experience. Having been secretary of the Professional Front in Rufa'a during the October Revolution, he possessed the kind of familiarity with the political environment that other Alliance members lacked.<sup>53</sup> Part of the reason that he became a prime ministerial nominee was that the leading professional activists had decided on 6 April that the presidency of the Union Alliance should be awarded to the Doctors' Union, given the critical role that it had played in combating Nimeiri's regime during its 1984 strike.<sup>54</sup> In this sense, Jizouli Dafa'allah was simply in the right place at the right time. One former Alliance member now insists that they would never have allowed this to happen had they known about his personal political history and about the fact that he would oppose outright cancellation of the September Laws – indeed, it seems that his background in the Muslim Brotherhood was not widely known at the time. Given their resentment of his actions as transitional prime minister, it is unsurprising that a number of former Alliance members have tried to downplay his role as chairman of the Doctors' Union

in the period leading up to the *Intifada*. Claims have been made that he was chosen as head of the Doctors' Union only because the regime would have been unwilling to negotiate with a more radical figure, that he and Hussein Abu Salih attended the various meetings of the Union Alliance and listened but never spoke, and that these same two opposed the initial decision to declare an open strike during the famous meeting of the Doctors' Union on 27 March 1985.<sup>55</sup> It is difficult to know the extent to which these charges are exaggerated, but what cannot be denied is that Jizouli Dafa'allah (unlike his predecessor in 1964) did ultimately oversee the two strikes and was arrested for his role on both occasions.<sup>56</sup> In this sense at least, he had earned himself sufficiently robust credentials to be considered for the role of prime minister, and cannot be regarded simply as an ICF 'plant'. To do so would be to deny the capacity of non-Turabist Islamists such as the interim prime minister to engage in civil action and support democratic transition.

Jizouli Dafa'allah was certainly not a member of the ICF or NIF, and was no power-seeking stooge – he did not obtain any further political positions after stepping down as transitional prime minister at the end of the interim period; nor was he a 'compromise candidate' like Sirr al-Khatim al-Khalifa in 1964. His Islamist convictions may have been of an individualistic nature, but they made him a good choice for military leaders vehemently opposed to secularist or leftist influences in the government. Former NIF man Mahjub Irwa's description of his attitude towards the party as 'neutral plus' is probably close to the truth.<sup>57</sup> As will be demonstrated below, he did not actively encourage pro-NIF policies, but his cabinet opposed secularist and leftist measures more openly than they did Islamist ones.

The relationship of TMC leaders Siwar al-Dahab and Taj al-Din Fadl with the NIF, as revealed in the previous chapter, was probably one of sympathy, or at least one of shared outlook, rather than the product of direct manipulation. As soon as the army leadership took power on 6 April, they sent a plane to free al-Turabi from imprisonment in al-Ubayyid.<sup>58</sup> The next day, as the Alliance leaders were meeting the generals at the army headquarters, the newly formed NIF staged a demonstration outside it supporting the military takeover and demanding an end to the general strike.<sup>59</sup> Sudanese academics and members of the Alliance who have criticized the NIF-military relationship claim that al-Turabi's new party sent representatives to meet the TMC on 10 April, the day after it was formed. They maintain that they arrived before members of the Alliance parties, who were shocked when they reached the general headquarters and realized that the NIF were already there.<sup>60</sup> Notes on the 10 April meeting compiled by the National Alliance record that Ali Uthman Taha and Uthman Medawi of the NIF entered the discussions at 10:45 and began to remark that neither the unions nor the 'traditional parties' had any right to engage in political activity.<sup>61</sup> This brazen contempt for the Alliance gave an early warning of the NIF's lack of respect for the democratic process and can be seen as prefiguring their involvement in Umar al-Bashir's coup 4 years later.

Siwar al-Dahab denies having given the NIF favourable treatment, observing: 'I never ended up in a situation where this confronted me and we treated them as other parties'.<sup>62</sup> However, as will be demonstrated below, the TMC pursued agendas that were broadly compatible with the aims of the NIF. El-Affendi admitted in 1989 that



'It is not yet clear what role Ikhwan played in the coup of 6 April, but they could not have asked for a more favourable arrangement.'<sup>63</sup> As seen in Chapter 5, Ali Uthman Taha's message probably reached Siwar al-Dahab too late to influence his decision to announce a military takeover, but it is clear that the ICF/NIF did consider him a favourable candidate for the role of president.

While the TMC and NIF had relatively similar ideological proclivities, the soldiers probably did not favour Hasan al-Turabi's party any more than the other non-secular parties. This is evident from the political make-up of the five commission appointed by the TMC to draw up an interim constitution. Its members were Mirghani al-Nasri of the Islamic Socialist Party, Farouk Bireir of the Umma, Mamoun Sinada and Suleiman Dahab of the DUP and only one NIF representative, Hafiz al-Shaikh.<sup>64</sup> The Islamist parties within the 'modern forces' were favoured more than their secularist rivals, and therefore, the largely pro-Khatmi TMC gave more representation to the DUP than any other party. The conservative outlook of the constitution they established, which omitted a number of the more liberal aspects of the 1985 National Charter,<sup>65</sup> reflected the conservative views of these parties. This further illustrates the extent to which the tendency of analysts to assume that Sudanese post-colonial political life was defined by a Manichaean duel between the Muslim Brotherhood and SCP had led them to neglect the role of the 'sectarian' parties during the political transitions.

## The transitional government's rift with the unions

With a number of Islamist 'fellow travellers' in both the cabinet and the TMC, it was not surprising that many of the unions, particularly those closely aligned with the political left, became disenchanted. These bodies used the 'Union Alliance' (*al-tajammu' al-niqabi*) as a voice of protest against the policies of the interim regime. With quasi-Islamist union leaders from the National Alliance such as Umar Abd al-Ati, Jizouli Dafa'allah and Hussein Abu Salih having joined the cabinet, it was the left-leaning Awad al-Karim Muhammad Ahmad – appointed secretary of the Union Alliance on 6 April – who acted as its spokesman. This body immediately became an object of the wrath of the military Islamists. In a meeting between Awad al-Karim Muhammad Ahmad and TMC member Ibrahim Yusuf Awad on 9 April, Umar al-Bashir appeared and interjected that the Union Alliance were 'a bunch of Communists' and that the army could deal with them in one night if they so chose! Awad al-Karim Muhammad Ahmad protested to Uthman Abdallah, the head of the TMC's political committee, but his objections did not lead to any actions being taken against al-Bashir.<sup>66</sup>

The Union Alliance, along with the various bodies it incorporated, was highly outspoken during the transitional period. On 2 May 1985, the doctors of Khartoum hospital, who had played a critical part during the *Intifada*, issued a statement insisting that the TMC should cancel the State of Emergency, form a parliament led by professional representatives, transfer power in the regions from military governors to civilian bodies, cancel the 1983 September Laws and dismiss ministers who had not been appointed with the agreement of the unions and the parties. A number of these demands would be reiterated by the Union Alliance a month later.<sup>67</sup> However, the TMC did not appear even to have considered any of them as a basis for negotiation.

Other unions insisted that bosses associated with the May Regime – the ‘mini-Nimeiri in every workplace’ – be cleansed. On 10 May, the Bank Employees’ Union launched a protest in Khartoum, calling for senior bankers to be held to account for corruption and economic malpractice.<sup>68</sup> This demonstration was broken up by the police, and the governor of Khartoum responded 3 days later with a complete ban on protest rallies in the capital.<sup>69</sup> This was soon transgressed by the Auditors’ Union, which marched in protest against the TMC’s refusal to dismiss the auditor general, another Nimeiri relic. Members of the Auditors’ Union issued a collective statement threatening to resign *en masse*.<sup>70</sup> The crisis led to a lengthy negotiation between the TMC and the Auditors’ Union, which was supported by the Union Alliance, but it failed to secure a resolution.<sup>71</sup> Meanwhile, the Union Alliance continued to demand that the government sack senior bank managers who had acquired their positions under Nimeiri, and that the finance minister Awad Abd al-Majid, who was refusing to reverse Nimeiri’s policy of cooperation with the IMF, should resign.<sup>72</sup> Although similar protests were being launched by branches of the Union Alliance in the provinces,<sup>73</sup> they achieved little and, as will be seen below, the interim regime failed to confront corruption in the state bureaucracy.

What particularly infuriated the unions was that while the transitional government was retaining bosses and public servants whom they considered responsible for the injustices of the Nimeiri system, it was refusing to return to their jobs union activists dismissed on account of their opposition to the May Regime. Although a committee was established at the attorney-general’s office to handle the return of these men, it achieved limited results. On 5 September, a body representing the dismissed workers camped outside the cabinet building in protest against the sluggishness of the government in dealing with the issue.<sup>74</sup> At this stage, the press reported that 251 workers at the education ministry were still waiting to get their jobs back and that thirty-six doctors were yet to have their cases dealt with by the ministry of health.<sup>75</sup> In March 1986, the finance minister mollified the protesters somewhat by agreeing to pay out 4 million Sudanese pounds to the dismissed employees.<sup>76</sup> However, it seems that hardly any of them were able to return to their jobs. Leftists and trade unionists tend to attribute this to the government perception that these men were communists or, at the very least, communist sympathizers.<sup>77</sup> Again, this reflected the defensive approach of the TMC – it was anti-communist and anti-Ba’athist, before anything else.

The transitional regime also displayed its antipathy towards the unions through its rejection of plans for electoral representation of workers’ and professional bodies. On 15 December 1985, the SCP proposed that 110 out of 390 seats in the new parliament should be allotted to the ‘modern forces’, including 53 seats for workers’ representatives and 15 for the professionals.<sup>78</sup> Meanwhile, the National Alliance – with the exception of the DUP, which flatly rejected the proposal for representation of the ‘modern forces’ – recommended allocating 45 seats out of a total of 225 to union representatives, including 19 for workers’ unions.<sup>79</sup> After the independent electoral commission was unable to resolve the dispute, a joint TMC-cabinet committee rejected the plans of the SCP and the Alliance and instead elected to return to the old policy of establishing seats specifically for graduates, increasing the number to 28.<sup>80</sup> At first glance, this measure might be considered a sop to the SCP, which in 1965 had secured the majority of its electoral victories in the graduate districts. However, as we have seen, in the 1970s the

Islamic Movement had replaced the SCP as the dominant force in the universities, though not the labour movement. The decision to limit representation of the 'modern forces' to graduates has therefore been taken as evidence of the interim government's sympathy with the NIF.<sup>81</sup> This is somewhat vindicated by the fact that the NIF did win in all but three of the 28 graduate districts in the 1986 elections.<sup>82</sup> However, Jizouli Dafa'allah has responded to claims that this illustrated his pandering to the NIF by observing both that the graduate seats were already established by precedent and that he as a professional himself had actually been in favour of greater representation for the 'modern forces', but was outvoted in a joint TMC-cabinet meeting.<sup>83</sup>

TMC policy towards the various unions revealed the conservative outlook of the transitional regime. It further demonstrated the extent to which its policy corresponded with that of the Islamic Movement, which had shown scant sympathy for union demands in the later years of the May Regime. At face value, Siwar al-Dahab's takeover might be identified as what Africanists have termed – albeit rather sceptically – a 'guardian coup', whereby the military intervenes to remove a corrupt political order and then upholds its promise to return to the barracks.<sup>84</sup> However, the TMC's internal takeover might also be compared to the 'veto-type coup' identified by commentators on Latin America whereby the military intervenes to prevent the intelligentsia and skilled workers from obtaining economic and political representation. Such coups herald the decline of a populist and inclusive system of politics, such as that espoused by the early Nimeiri regime, that is held to have become economically unsustainable.<sup>85</sup> While Siwar al-Dahab's 'coup', if it is understood in this way, only lasted for a year, it successfully prevented these classes from obtaining extra representation and set the scene for the more conservative parties to dominate the third democracy. The failure of the unions to press home their demands also leads us to question just how much of a victory the April *Intifada* was for the 'modern forces'. The protests of the unions also exposed the divisions among former allies in the National Alliance. When the Engineers' Union, one of the six unions to sign the National Charter, went on strike in January 1986, Umar Abd al-Ati, the man who had read out the declaration of the *Intifada*, publicly condemned the action in his role as transitional attorney-general.<sup>86</sup> The Alliance, it seemed, was no longer much of an alliance at all.

## The second civil war and government-Alliance relations

The failure of the transitional regime to reach an accommodation with John Garang's SPLA rebels in southern Sudan represented another blow to the leftists, secularists and liberals within the Alliance, for these individuals had risked much by attempting to reach out to them. On 11 April, the National Alliance issued a statement praising Garang's role in the anti-Nimeiri struggle and encouraging him to come to Khartoum and 'join in the popular movement'.<sup>87</sup> In early May the Union Alliance publicly criticized attempts by the TMC to undertake diplomatic manoeuvres against the rebel bases in Ethiopia, insisting that Garang and his movement represented 'an important faction among this people' and pressing for a democratic solution to the conflict in the south.<sup>88</sup> Meanwhile, it seems that both the SCP and Sudanese Ba'ath Party hoped that



by bringing the SPLA to Khartoum they would be able to outvote the religious-political parties at the forthcoming elections.<sup>89</sup> The SPLA was still very much dependent upon the patronage of Marxist Ethiopia at this stage, and its initial manifesto in 1983 had incorporated a great deal of socialist language.<sup>90</sup> This would, in theory, have offered the potential for common ground to be forged with the SCP.

Unfortunately for the northern Sudanese left, Garang felt unable to play along. He referred to the new transitional regime as 'May 2' and refused to negotiate with it.<sup>91</sup> Northern Sudanese politicians of all ideological shades, including Taj al-Din Fadl, Jizouli Dafa'allah and Muhammad Ibrahim Nugd, have expressed frustration at what they perceived to be the rebel leader's short-sightedness in describing the new situation in this manner.<sup>92</sup> Nugd recalled soon before his death that he visited Garang in Addis Ababa during the interim period and tried to inform him of his mistake, arguing 'a change has happened my brother, parties have been legalized, political prisoners have been released and papers have begun to appear'.<sup>93</sup>

There was at the time, and has been since, much speculation concerning Garang's reluctance to enter the embrace of the Alliance. In June 1985, representatives of the Arab Socialist Nasserist party announced that they had met him in Addis Ababa but that he had declared himself unwilling to participate in the electoral process as this would simply allow Sudan's right-wing parties, which still maintained massive support bases in the rural areas of the north, to return to power.<sup>94</sup> Thus Garang clearly had less faith than the SCP in the combined electoral capabilities of the Sudanese left. Jizouli Dafa'allah argues that 'I think at that time John Garang thought he could rule the whole of Sudan, and the *Intifada* interrupted his plans for that'.<sup>95</sup> In another sense, the *Intifada* provided Garang with a number of military opportunities. His decision not to come to Khartoum did enable him to score a considerable number of victories and capture a great number of army garrisons in the south at a time when the army leadership was distracted by its role in the TMC.<sup>96</sup>

Was Garang's lack of faith in the TMC justified? The army leadership had made efforts to come to terms with the SPLA. Siwar al-Dahab and Taj al-Din Fadl insist that they attempted to reach the SPLA chief via his office in London and through a number of relatives and members of his batch in the army,<sup>97</sup> although Garang would later claim that he had heard nothing until he received letters from Uthman Abdullah and Jizouli Dafa'allah in the third week of June.<sup>98</sup> On 19 April, the TMC made a conciliatory statement acknowledging that 'wrongs had been committed against the south and against southerners', and issued 'decree number 14', which revoked Nimeiri's controversial presidential order of 1983 dividing the south into three regions and pledging to use the 1972 Addis Ababa agreement as a framework for negotiations.<sup>99</sup> It declared an immediate ceasefire in the south on 28 April, offered amnesty to southern rebels still carrying arms against the government and invited international aid organizations to help deal with the famine in the south.<sup>100</sup> Garang later claimed in a letter to Jizouli Dafa'allah that this ceasefire was merely a tactical ploy designed to buy time to prepare for an offensive in Mongalla that did indeed take place in July, although Jizouli Dafa'allah responded that this incident was simply a response to SPLA incursions.<sup>101</sup> The TMC also exerted efforts to persuade Abel Alier, the architect of the Addis Ababa agreement, to take up a ministerial position, but he refused, and

less prominent men took up the three posts allocated to southerners.<sup>102</sup> None of these individuals were awarded portfolios as significant as that granted to Clement Mboro in 1964, which again highlighted the more conservative nature of the interim regime.

Moreover, Siwar al-Dahab had – maybe unintentionally – undermined his ‘dovish’ credentials through his decision to abrogate the 1973 constitution on 6 April. Although this was done on the pretext of removing the legal grounding for Nimeiri’s authoritarianism, he was, in effect, also abrogating the terms of the Addis Ababa agreement, written into the 1973 constitution.<sup>103</sup> Garang publicly condemned him for this decision. Moreover, the interim government provoked further anger in the south by insisting that until a political solution was reached, the system of three regions would, although revoked in principle, remain *de facto* and that these regions would be placed under military rule.<sup>104</sup> Southern politicians accused the NIF of being behind the policy of keeping the south divided, accusing them of attempting to make it a ‘tribal empire’.<sup>105</sup> However, the TMC decision to maintain the re-division on a temporary basis probably represented its natural conservatism and reluctance to alter the *status quo*, more than any direct manipulation by the NIF.

While TMC policy towards the south was not dictated by the NIF right from the beginning, the intensification of the fighting later in the year certainly brought them closer together. As the war in the south re-ignited, the military cooled towards Garang and the leftists who had extolled his virtues. Throughout late 1985, articles appeared in the armed forces magazine, *al-Quwwat al-Musallaha*, condemning the National Alliance’s sympathetic position towards Garang.<sup>106</sup> In November 1985, an interviewer asked Uthman Abdullah: ‘Is it true that the army is siding with a certain party against the National Alliance?’ Uthman Abdullah, the most proficient ideological chameleon of the April uprising, now answered the question with an unusual directness, telling the interviewer that she should ‘call things by their names’, openly acknowledging the army’s pro-NIF sympathy and contempt for the Alliance. ‘When the Alliance, or some elements within it, were doubting the path [taken by] the armed forces and its good intentions and were making a hero out of Garang’, argued Uthman Abdullah, ‘the morale of the fighters began to decline ... but when the Islamic Movement decided to arrange a demonstration in support of the armed forces they began to feel that they were fighting for the right cause’.<sup>107</sup> This was a reference to the ‘defence of the faith and the homeland’ demonstrations of 21 September 1985, which were planned by the NIF with the assistance of its burgeoning media empire.<sup>108</sup> In a veiled reference to some of the leftists and liberals in the Alliance, Uthman Abdullah asked ‘for whose benefit are some of the political forces inciting people against their armed forces?’<sup>109</sup> Given that Uthman Abdullah was no doctrinaire Islamist, was reported by *Africa Confidential* 2 months earlier to have been the biggest ‘dove’ in the TMC,<sup>110</sup> and had in the past been amenable to the leftist Free Officer Organization in the army, this stinging attack revealed the extent to which the Alliance’s failure to bring in Garang to Khartoum had polarized the political arena.

Garang did eventually meet the National Alliance at the negotiating table, at Koka Dam in Ethiopia between 20 and 24 March 1986. The Alliance delegation, which incorporated almost every political party in Sudan other than the DUP and NIF, made some progress and the meetings resulted in the ‘Koka Dam Declaration’.

This declaration proposed that a constitutional convention attended by government and party representatives should be held in June 1986 to discuss 'the *Basic Problems of Sudan* and not the so-called problem of southern Sudan'.<sup>111</sup> Meanwhile, the September Laws would be repealed, the State of Emergency revoked and an interim constitution adopted that would incorporate the principles of regional self-government laid out in the old Addis Ababa agreement.<sup>112</sup> Unfortunately, the fact that the DUP and NII – in the event, two of the three major vote grabbers in the 1986 elections – did not attend made the agreement 'a dead letter'.<sup>113</sup> The planned convention was never held.

For Sudan's leftists, the failure of Garang to enter negotiations with the transitional government represented a lost opportunity to prevent the slide towards Islamist hegemony and, ultimately, the 1989 coup.<sup>114</sup> The SCP's Amira al-Jizouli describes it as the 'number one reason' the *Intifada* failed to achieve its goals.<sup>115</sup> However, the missed opportunity also illustrated the general weakness of the northern Sudanese left at the time, seen through its inability to pressure the TMC into offering terms more favourable to the rebel leader. Nevertheless, the fact that northern Sudanese leftists have tended to express their exasperation at Garang himself more than the TMC perhaps reveals their belief that it was the SPLA leader's own ambition, and his desire to exploit the distraction of the army leadership to achieve his military goals in the south, that led to his obstinacy. At the same time, Garang may have felt that a return to the system of Khartoum-centred liberal democracy might have served the southern rebels as badly in the 1980s as it had in the 1960s, when the northern Sudanese left was more politically potent.

### Vacillations over *shari'a*

Another issue that exposed the ideological fissures within the National Alliance and the transitional regime was the debate over the September Laws promulgated by Nimeiri in 1983 so as to give a veneer of Islamic legitimacy to his increasingly unstable rule. Almost every faction within the Sudanese political arena agreed that the deposed dictator had used these laws to pursue his own ends and that they could not remain in their existing form. However, beyond this there was little agreement. Some argued that the laws should be abolished outright and replaced with secular equivalents based on the codes promulgated in the early Nimeiri period, others that they should be abolished and replaced with versions considered by them to conform more closely with *shari'a* and yet others that they should be retained with only individual articles modified. The fact that a number of Alliance members wished to return to the legal situation obtaining in the first decade of the May Regime period reminds us that many of them identified more with the technocratic secularism of the early Nimeiri period than the mass religious politics of the second democracy. However, given that the interim president, prime minister and attorney-general were all men who possessed varying degrees of sympathy with Islamism, it is not surprising that the last of these three policy options was followed. Siwar al-Dahab declared at a press conference on 15 April that 'Islamic Law', by which he meant the September Laws, would remain, although individual laws might be modified.<sup>116</sup>



The decision not to abolish the September Laws reflected the ideological proclivities of those who led the transitional regime. As we have seen, Siwar al-Dahab had declared even before the army takeover that 'leftist demonstrations' would not persuade him to cancel *shari'a*,<sup>117</sup> while Jizouli Dafa'allah had stormed out of a National Alliance meeting after the Alliance's leftists and secularists demanded that *shari'a* be removed outright.<sup>118</sup> When the September Laws were initially promulgated in 1983, he had written to Nimeiri on behalf of the Doctors' Union expressing his support for them<sup>119</sup> – although it should be borne in mind that the worst excesses occurred as a result of the State of Emergency, which was Nimeiri's response to the strike he led. The leaders of the interim government also represented their decision as the only practical option available to them, observing that it was unreasonable for an unelected government to set the tone on such a key issue and that politicians with more of a popular mandate could determine the issue after the 1986 vote.<sup>120</sup> Predictably, time constraints were also offered as an excuse after the event.<sup>121</sup> While the issue remained unresolved, the more controversial aspects of the law were 'frozen'; for instance, the chief prosecutor directed the courts that drinkers brought before them should not be tried.<sup>122</sup> This was, thus, one of many issues illustrating the transitional regime's wariness regarding embracing the principle of 'revolutionary legitimacy'.

The issue of *shari'a* revealed further divisions between the National Alliance and the government, and within the government itself. On 7 November, the Alliance issued a statement advising the government to replace the September Laws with their pre-1983 equivalents but maintain the provisions forbidding the consumption of alcohol by Muslims.<sup>123</sup> This represented a compromise between the Alliance's leftists and secularists on one hand, and on the other, the views of al-Sadiq al-Mahdi, who, although bitterly critical of the September Laws, wished to persevere with some semblance of *shari'a*. However, the DUP failed to support the statement, which, considering that the NIF were not part of the Alliance anyway meant that two of the three major northern religious parties refused to back the proposals.<sup>124</sup> This situation continued after the 1986 elections, when the DUP and NIF blocked further proposals for replacing the September Laws.<sup>125</sup>

Nevertheless, although Umar Abd al-Ati as attorney-general was unwilling to revoke the September Laws, he was prepared to compromise with their critics. Al-Ati also falls within the 'non-party Islamist' category, although he is really an Islamist only in believing that the law should be grounded in *shari'a*. He has never joined a political party because, he says, 'I don't like politics'.<sup>126</sup> However, he admitted to being friendly with his former law tutor Hasan al-Turabi,<sup>127</sup> something for which leftists within the Alliance have criticized him.<sup>128</sup> Nevertheless, his Islamist convictions are of a comparatively liberal type and, although he was critical of the leftists in the Alliance, he can in no way be construed as an NIF 'satellite' within the government. When Asma Mahmud Taha appealed to the High Court for her father's trial to be declared void, al-Ati declared that it had been a violation of law and justice which he had no wish to defend.<sup>129</sup>

Abd al-Ati's position on the September Laws reflected his streak of moderate Islamic thought. In March 1986, he distributed a series of proposed replacements to the Chief Justice and Chairman of the Bar Association; they maintained the use of

*hadd* amputation penalties but placed significant legal obstacles in the way of their implementation: they stipulated that amputation penalties should only be applied in cases of theft when property worth 1,300 Sudanese pounds was stolen, whereas under the September Laws, the figure had been 100. This would have prevented such punishments being applied in cases of poverty crime, which was what had caused such outrage when the September Laws were initially promulgated. Moreover, amputation penalties could not be applied until they had been confirmed by three judges from the appeal court. Abd al-Ati also reduced the number of offences for which flogging could be inflicted, and removed 'intention to commit fornication' (*shuru' fi al-zina*) as an offence.<sup>130</sup> It was a considerably more liberal draft than that which Hasan al-Turabi would propose when he became attorney-general in the third democratic era.<sup>131</sup> Al-Ati's position also corresponded with that taken by the Bar Association, which was still headed by the co-founder of the Islamic Socialist Front, Mirghani al-Nasri. The union proposed that the ban on alcohol consumption should be maintained, although only for Muslims, and that the 1983 criminal codes should not be abandoned but 'reformed through civilized, progressive proposals ... in harmony with Islamic *shari'a*'.<sup>132</sup> Thus al-Ati's proposals reflected the general desire of large sections of the northern Sudanese professional elite for some form of *shari'a* to be applied, more than they did the NIF controlling the new government by 'remote control'. Nevertheless, they further illustrated the inability of the secularists within the Alliance to influence government policy.

### Performing the *Intifada* in the courtroom

The leftists and secularist radicals in the Alliance had lost out to the conservatives over a number of issues: IMF policy, the September Laws, relations with the south and the formation of the transitional government. However, the series of political trials that occurred throughout the transitional period offered these factions an opportunity to take out their frustration on representatives of the regime they had overthrown. If there was one issue that led the transitional government to follow a policy of revolutionary legitimacy, it was these trials. By coming down hard on those who had participated in 'May 1', they offered it an opportunity to demonstrate that it was far more than just 'May 2'.

The process of transitional justice fell victim to numerous initial setbacks. The failure to appoint an attorney-general for over 2 months delayed the start of the trials.<sup>133</sup> Then, the early judicial work was disrupted when Abd al-Wahhab Bob, the man charged with heading the committee investigating the May coup, was removed by the Chief Justice for abusing his position by agreeing to defend Umar al-Tayyib!<sup>134</sup> Nevertheless, the trials of the top SSU apparatchiks were highly effective. There were a number of reasons for this. First, the fact that the general strike brought all air travel to a halt made it hard for Nimeiri's lieutenants to escape. While the president was already outside Sudan and his media advisor Muhammad Sulaiman's subsequently vindicated lack of faith in the May Regime's survival capacity led him to catch the last flight out of the country before the general strike, the majority of his strongmen appear to have believed until the last

minute that he might return.<sup>135</sup> Bahieddin Idris did not, but he was unable to make it to the airport quickly enough to catch the last flight from Khartoum.<sup>136</sup>

Second, and most controversially, the transitional regime chose not to repeal Nimeiri's odious State Security Law, which naturally attracted the criticism of leftists and liberals.<sup>137</sup> However, Umar Abd al-Ati was quick to observe that maintaining the law was essential if the authoritarians of the May era were to be brought to justice, insisting that cancelling it would lead to the premature release of partisans of the Nimeiri regime still under investigation.<sup>138</sup> The prosecution lawyers – although a number were former oppositionists who identified with critics of the transitional regime's perseverance with the State Security Law in other contexts – had no qualms about fighting the old regime with its own weapons. When the former SSO chief Umar al-Tayyib objected to the fact that his court had been formed under the aegis of the old State Security Law, the prosecution team responded that for 8 years Umar al-Tayyib 'had not known anything else!'<sup>139</sup> The utilization of Nimeiri's State Security Law illustrated the inevitable difficulties that faced oppositionists trying to uproot authoritarian systems at this time – as Charles Tripp has observed, resistance 'becomes too beholden to the logic of the power that it tried to displace'.<sup>140</sup>

Another important reason for the success of the trials was that the prosecution teams were able to access substantial amounts of credible evidence from eye witnesses and both visual and written documentation. While the TMC's decision to leave the cabinet alone for 2 days after 6 April did give them the opportunity to burn a number of important documents or smuggle them out of Sudan, Alliance sympathizers were able to gain access to a number of files before this occurred.<sup>141</sup> Al-Ati recalls that one of the Free Officers, Haydar Musharraf, managed to arrest Bahieddin Idris' secretary who was attempting to smuggle his papers out of his office and into her house, and then surrendered them to him when he became attorney-general.<sup>142</sup> The fact that Musharraf held onto these files for 2 months indicates that the Free Officer Organization did not trust the military leadership, which had conducted a number of the initial investigations before the appointment of al-Ati, to pursue cases against their former colleagues from the defunct regime with sufficient zeal. The civilian prosecutors did not lack enthusiasm. When Idris came to trial, he was presented with over thirty-seven documents exposing his involvement in corrupt economic activity during the period that he was working at the palace.<sup>143</sup> Security reports from Gedaref were presented at the 'Fallasha' trial, in addition to an American documentary on 'Operation Moses' and another film compiled by the investigation team based on interviews with a number of witnesses from eastern Sudan who had directly observed the smuggling of the Fallasha.<sup>144</sup> In the trial of the plotters of the May coup, the prosecution team brought a list of seventy-six witnesses, which incorporated a wide cross-section of the Sudanese political, military and cultural elite, including party leaders such as al-Mahdi and al-Turabi, the singer Muhammad al-Wardi, TMC members and former Free Officers who had personally witnessed the scheming that led to the takeover.<sup>145</sup>

Fourth, the trials generated extra impact by being broadcast directly to the public, which illustrated the self-confidence of the prosecuting authorities. The trial of the 1969 *putschists* turned into a public debate on the merits of democracy.<sup>146</sup> Meanwhile, Umar al-Tayyib's hearing saw the former vice-president branded a traitor to the



nation on account of his collaboration with Israel.<sup>147</sup> During Zubeir Rajab's trial, a long list of his corruptly obtained properties and possessions was published in the newspapers.<sup>148</sup> The trials thus acted as a public theatre in which the ideals associated with the *Intifada* – nationalism, democracy and justice – were performed.

In many respects, a spectacular performance was all that was achieved. By directing great energy to the accomplishment of a few high-profile political prosecutions, the interim government effectively abdicated responsibility for rooting out the more general forms of corruption and abuse of power that had been embedded in the Nimeiri system. In the majority of cases involving minor corruption, and some cases of major corruption, it was agreed that the defendants would arrange a financial settlement with the Sudanese state and thus avoid conviction.<sup>149</sup> Abd al-Ati justifies this policy by arguing that it was the only reasonable option, given the restrictions on time and resources then prevailing.<sup>150</sup> The limited achievements of the transitional courts are acknowledged, and defended by Jizouli Dafa'allah. 'Not many were tried, I don't think more should have been tried', he admits, adding that '... in the context of a dictatorial regime, many people do things that they are not wholly responsible for.'<sup>151</sup>

The main 'fall guys' of the public trials were the leftist, pan-Arabist, and secularist officers and officials of the SSU old guard – Umar al-Tayyib, Mamoun Awad Abu Zaid, Khalid Hassan Abbas, Zein al-Abdin Abd al-Qadir and Bahieddin Idris. As seen in Chapter 2, a number of these individuals had been targeted indirectly by the ICF through the 'instantaneous justice courts' in 1984. At the same time, a number of the senior SSU figures who escaped conviction joined the NIF soon after its establishment in 1985.<sup>152</sup> Meanwhile, none of the Islamists associated with Nimeiri after his migration to the right in 1977 were severely punished, probably because of the relative sympathy felt by the transitional regime for the NIF. Adlan Hardallo attributes Abd al-Ati's refusal to prosecute al-Turabi to his close friendship with the latter, as does al-Turabi himself.<sup>153</sup> However, the charges the enemies of the NIF chief attempted to bring against him were certainly not as severe as those faced by others – they consisted of allegations that he had impeded the course of justice when a case was raised against an SSO officer, and that he had given legal sanction to Bahieddin Idris' decision to reverse the Sudanese boycott on Coca-Cola.<sup>154</sup> Few sins could be laid directly at the door of al-Turabi; after all, he was not responsible for the *final* draft of the September Laws.

The transitional authorities took only limited action against the designers of the September Laws, Awad al-Jeed and Naya Abu Gurun, both of whom had links to the Islamic Movement, but were not members of the ICF. Both of them spent a significant time in prison during the interim period, but after this no further action was taken against either man.<sup>155</sup> A criminal case was brought against al-Mukashifi al-Kabbashi for his involvement in the application of the much condemned legislation, but the Court of Appeal cancelled it on the grounds that his position as Chief Justice gave him immunity.<sup>156</sup> Again, this illustrated the transitional authorities' wariness of appearing to be against any form of *shari'a*, even the highly arbitrary and controversial form applied by Nimeiri.

The failure of the prosecuting authorities to clamp down on the ICF and its affiliates for the policies enacted during its alliance with Nimeiri perhaps illustrated the fear they had of provoking the sleeping giant that was the NIF; but they did not reflect any

doctrinaire pro-Islamic Movement policies. The majority of the prosecuting lawyers had Ba'athist or communist links, and Abd al-Ati recalls that he chose them because they were 'good lawyers'.<sup>157</sup> The fact that the trials were open and transparent and achieved convictions based on a significant amount of credible evidence marks them out as one of the most significant achievements of the interim period – although the judiciary's reliance on Nimeiri's State Security Law to indict his former lieutenants indicated that even this achievement was forcing the *Intifada* to negotiate compromises with its own values. Moreover, the failure of the transitional authorities to tackle all but the most substantial abuses of political power demonstrated just how much the decision to limit the interim period to 1 year had impeded the efforts of the National Alliance to extirpate corruption.

### The dissolution of the SSO: A job half done?

Although the dissolution of Nimeiri's State Security Organization represented a serious attempt by the forces of the *Intifada* to eradicate the legacy of political violence created by the May Regime, the move was somewhat illusory. Alongside the abrogation of the 1973 constitution and indictment of the former president's top officials, it appeared to represent one of the most radical decisions taken by the new government. However, there is a complex debate concerning the real reasons for the action taken against the SSO, and it has been interpreted at different times as a victory for either the political left or the political right. Initially, it was perceived to be a response to popular pressure exerted by the same civil protesters who had propelled the *Intifada* forward. Siwar al-Dahab did not take any actions against the SSO on 6 April, and only intervened 2 days later when violent clashes broke out between its operatives and demonstrators attempting to occupy its headquarters and demanding revenge for its crimes.<sup>158</sup> Taj al-Din Fadl and Uthman Abdullah admit that the military leadership decided to occupy the SSO headquarters to prevent bloody clashes between security agents and demonstrators as well as the potential exposure of the SSO archives, thus implicitly endorsing the view that the army was forced, somewhat unwillingly, into dissolving it by popular pressure.<sup>159</sup> Moreover, the political parties opposing Nimeiri's regime appear to have derived significant benefit from its downfall. After the dissolution, members of these parties visited ex-operatives in prison, extracting from them the names of party officials who had collaborated with the SSO and the May Regime, which were then published in the party newspapers.<sup>160</sup>

However, an alternative interpretation contends that the dissolution of the SSO was not a victory for the leftists or the political forces that had driven the uprising, but part of a wider 'intelligence battle' being waged by the ICF/NIF and its allies in the military. There have been claims, denied by Fadlallah Burma Nasir as the chief Unuma representative within the military at the time, that Sadiq al-Mahdi's party gained access to the intelligence records through al-Hadi Bushra, who was in charge of the committee tasked with dissolving the SSO.<sup>161</sup> However, most sources focus on the role of the Islamists. The Free Officer Abd al-Aziz Khalid asserts that the dissolution of the SSO was engineered by Islamist officers within the army so

that the Islamic Movement could rebuild a new security apparatus from the ashes of the SSO.<sup>162</sup> He and others have claimed that Taj al-Din Fadl, whose enmities against the institution and debatable links to the ICF/NIF have already been documented, played a part in the decision to dissolve it.<sup>163</sup> Others maintain that Umar al-Bashir, whose links to the ICF military cell were less contentious, was highly involved in the events surrounding the organization's collapse. Hashim Abu Rannat, a senior security operative, recalls that while he was in prison, he was interviewed by al-Bashir, who had been appointed by the interim government as one of the army representatives on a panel charged with investigating the SSO.<sup>164</sup> Al-Bashir requested that he hand over the organization's records, so that 'the Ba'athists and communist parties do not get their hands on them'.<sup>165</sup> Abu Rannat informed Bashir that the records were available only on microfilm, and gave him the names of the few people who knew how to access it.<sup>166</sup> Al-Bashir's intervention seems to have played a crucial role in determining the future of Sudan's main intelligence agency. According to Bayoumi, 99 per cent of the intelligence documentation that had been produced by the May Regime was, thus, kept by the army.<sup>167</sup> Meanwhile, it seems that the senior members of the interim cabinet were denied this information, as were the lawyers who served on the investigation committees.<sup>168</sup> Therefore, it appears that the crucial battles that occurred in the wake of the *Intifada* for control over Sudan's political intelligence were won by the Islamic Movement and its military allies. Being denied access to such a crucial body of intelligence would have significantly hampered the efforts of the Alliance leaders to reform the Sudanese state, and, of course, the SSO itself.

SSO officers were put on trial, but other than Umar al-Tayyib himself, few were convicted. The most successful prosecution was brought about by the Sudanese Ba'ath Party, which managed to have seven operatives sentenced to 5 years in prison for the torture of Bashir Hamad prior to the show-trial of early 1985 – although the court reprieved Aazim Kabbashi, the reputed chief of the SSO's notorious torture unit.<sup>169</sup> It seems that many other victims did not come forward because of the lack of financial resources for a trial.<sup>170</sup> It was in any case difficult for the military tribunals to trace some of the SSO's most ruthless operatives, as Umar al-Tayyib refused to reveal the identities of his most well concealed officers.<sup>171</sup> Meanwhile, the political parties themselves had only a limited commitment to prosecuting former intelligence officers, which might, after all, harm potential relationships with the security apparatus.<sup>172</sup> In the wake of the *Intifada*, they would all launch drives to hire ex-SSO men for their private security organizations.<sup>173</sup> Even the interim prime minister began to reconsider the merits of the initial campaign against Nimeiri's former security apparatus. When Jizouli Dafa'allah handed over power to Sadiq al-Mahdi in 1986, he reportedly apologized to him twice, once for dissolving the SSO and again for not creating a replacement organization.<sup>174</sup> 'A lot of trained people were in that organization', he remembers, 'and we needed its services'.<sup>175</sup> Both Abbas Madani and Siwar al-Dahab now express a similar regret.<sup>176</sup>

Nothing displayed the essential conservatism of the transitional government more clearly than the fact that its leaders came to regret their most radical act. It is unclear as to whether their decision to dissolve the SSO and seize its archives in its place was taken as a result of NIF influences or NIF pressure within the military and the government. However, the Islamist cells within the military clearly did play a significant role in the



process of dismantling the SSO, and the NIF did benefit from the process in that it was able to both infiltrate the security organization that took the place of the SSO after the interim period and recruit a number of former SSO agents into its own private security apparatus.<sup>177</sup> In this respect, the downfall of the SSO represented not so much a victory for liberalism and democracy as another significant link in the chain of events enabling the Islamic Movement to slowly and inexorably extend its grip over the key centres of power within the country.

## Conclusion

The distinctions that can be made between the events of 1964 and 1985 are in some respects only very fine, and yet highly significant. In 1985, the ideological parties exercised a less formal influence within the Alliance than they had in the Professional Front in 1964, given the weakness of the SCP and the rift between the ICF and the professional unions. However, in practice, the National Alliance became fractured along ideological lines at an even earlier stage than the Professional Front. This was due to the prominence of *shari'a* as an issue within the Sudanese political arena at the time, and this issue brought the secularists and the Islamists within the Alliance into conflict right from the beginning.

The length of the two transitional periods – a whole year in 1985–6 as compared with only 6 months in 1964–5 – represents another obvious point of contrast. However, what was probably more significant was that during both transitions, the more socially conservative parties knew that their extensive rural support networks would enable them to succeed in democratic elections. This, in turn, made it possible for them to ensure that the interim period was sufficiently limited to prevent the 'modern forces' and the leftists, in particular, from achieving their goals. Neither transition, for instance, offered sufficient time for the leftists who had been arbitrarily dismissed under the military regime to be returned to their jobs. Admittedly, the trials of the former regime leaders achieved more emphatic results in 1985 than they had in 1964. However, both interim governments limited themselves to targeting senior regime elements and eschewed launching more rigorous attempts to challenge the corruption and abuse of power that had become prevalent under the military dictatorships. The transitional government conducted even less cleansing within the civil service in 1985 than in 1964.

The other obvious distinction between 1964 and 1985 was that, following the April *Intifada*, the military exercised a much more direct and significant role in the interim period. Was Siwar al-Dahab's government 'May 2'? Since 'May 1' had evolved into an eclectic mix of technocrats, moderate socialists, Arab nationalists, Islamists and pro-Americans towards the end of Nimeiri's period, this is a hard question to answer. Arguably, the interim government continued a trend towards political Islam, begun by Nimeiri in the late 1970s, in that a number of leading individuals within the new regime were Islamist sympathizers and it cancelled the secular constitution of 1973 while leaving the September Laws intact. With the head of the armed forces becoming president, the military aspect of the May Regime persisted. However, Siwar al-Dahab

lacked Nimeiri's controlling and ambitious personality, and had secured his position more through the force of circumstance than the desire to dominate. When he made arbitrary decisions, he usually made them in response to perceived threats from the Ba'athists, SCP or SPLA. Moreover, it is worth remembering that those members of the Alliance who criticized the interim regime's refusal to return to the strict application of the Addis Ababa agreement of 1972, and the secular constitution and legal codes of 1973, were in their own way harking back to an earlier stage of 'May 1' rather than the parliamentary democracy of the 1960s.

Is it fair to say that Siwar al-Dahab aborted the *Intifada*? It is difficult to answer this question, since it is difficult to provide an internally coherent definition of what precisely the *Intifada* represented. Advocates of one man, one vote democracy and advocates of liberal and progressive governance often found themselves on opposite sides of the divides within the Alliance. If we identify the *Intifada* with a loose coalition of leftists, secularists and liberals who were demanding the outright cancellation of *shari'a* law, a lengthy transitional period and an expansion of the role of the unions in the government, then the answer is yes. Nevertheless, Siwar al-Dahab did not stand in the way of the re-emergence of party politics or a free press. Moreover, the transitional government stuck rigidly to its promise to arrange free and fair elections. As we have seen, even the SCP leader Ibrahim Nugd acknowledged that a change had happened in this regard. By focusing so explicitly on the elections, the interim regime relieved itself of the responsibility for tackling other dominant issues within the existing political environment, which it insisted would be best dealt with by a democratically elected government.

However, there were some matters that led the new government to exercise revolutionary authority. Apart from unilaterally abrogating the 1973 constitution, it also chose to dissolve the SSO and successfully tried a number of the figureheads of the May Regime. Nevertheless, those who lost out in this process also happened to be those who entered into conflict with the army and the ICF in the later years of the Nimeiri Regime. Even the more radical acts of the transitional period were less a result of revolutionary transformation than a continuation of the trend towards political Islam witnessed at the end of the former era. Nevertheless, the TMC was not simply a pliable tool of the NIF; rather, its policies reflected the conservative and defensive outlook of the military leadership, even though their interests did at times overlap with those of al-Turabi's party. This convergence did not become fully apparent until half way through the interim period, when the failure of the Alliance to bring John Garang to Khartoum and the intensification of fighting in the south strained the relationship between the military leadership and the liberals within the Alliance.

The other major difference is that while popular leftist ideologies had a general intellectual prevalence and influenced the outlook of the transitional cabinet in the 1960s, in 1985 the dogmas associated with political Islam were more significant. This was revealed by the decision of the transitional regime not to suspend *shari'a* and its establishment of an electoral system favouring the NIF and other religious parties of the Islamic north. Nevertheless, the interim regime was not a puppet of Hasan al-Turabi and the NIF. Men such as Jizouli Dafa'llah and Umar Abd al-Ati – who employed Ba'athist and communist lawyers to try Nimeiri's henchmen – espoused relatively

liberal forms of political Islam and identified with NIF ideology only in their belief that there should be a significant role for Islam in public life. To understand them only as puppets of the TMC and NIF who helped abort the *Intifada* would be to assume that political secularists had a monopoly on the *Intifada*, and to deny the capacity of these men to forge independent positions by trying to integrate their religious outlooks with the liberal and democratic ideals of the *Intifada*.



## The 'Revenge of May': The 'Salvation Revolution' of June 1989

Protests in recent years against Sudan's third and most tenacious military president, Umar al-Bashir, have raised hopes that the Sudanese people may be able to recreate the experiences of 1964 and 1985 and generate a 'Sudanese Spring'. However, for one prominent analyst of Sudanese politics, the nature of power politics in Sudan has changed so comprehensively since al-Bashir's coup in 1989 that it is unlikely that any 'third *Intifada*' can occur, at least not in the same way as the first two. De Waal lists four major factors – first, that the current opposition lacks the organizational capacity of previous ones such as the National Alliance of 1985; second, that Sudan's Islamists represent the most coherent political force within the country and a significant number of them still identify with the government; third, that the senior ranks of the army are dominated by 'Islamist-orientated' officers who are unlikely to 'side with the people'; and fourth, that the emergence of rebel movements in Darfur, South Kordofan and Blue Nile has made both the army and middle class protesters fear that any attempt to instigate a regime change will empower these rebel movements and lead to the disintegration of Sudan.<sup>1</sup>

Those doubting the prospects of a third *Intifada* might add two other reasons: first, al-Bashir's coup was supported by the political forces that had opposed the National Alliance during the *Intifada* and 1985 Interim period, which ensured that the *putschists* of 1989 were not only hostile to multi-party democracy, but also knew exactly how to prevent the circumstances that facilitated the first two *Intifadas* from repeating themselves; and second, the political forces that helped to forge the first two uprisings were disillusioned with the failings of the democratic periods they brought about. Jizouli Dafa'allah now looks back upon the parliamentary period that his transitional government helped usher in with a certain amount of disdain. He concludes that the political parties were ill-prepared for democratic politics after 16 years in isolation, 'and as a result there was nothing new, and the parties brought back their hesitant attitude, and the country returned to the situation [that had obtained] before the *Intifada* amidst their conflicts and their problems as if nothing had happened.'<sup>2</sup> Jizouli Dafa'allah's somewhat resigned judgement indicates the gulf in outlooks that existed between the urban professionals who helped to engineer the *Intifada* and the political forces that benefited the most from the re-emergence of liberal democracy.

Nevertheless, it is difficult to deny that the third democratic period failed to achieve the aims of the *Intifada*. Instead, it witnessed an intensification of the conflict in the south and a stepping up of the policy of arming ethnic militias that would ultimately make the second civil war so destructive.<sup>3</sup> The new government was unable to repair the economic situation, although this was at least partially due to Nimeiri's disastrous economic legacy. The government was left so heavily in debt that it was forced to negotiate adoption of a crippling austerity programme with the IMF, which in turn led to mass urban demonstrations in December 1988.<sup>4</sup> These demonstrations witnessed violent clashes between armed Umma Party supporters and left-wing urban demonstrators, which evoked memories of the confrontations between the *Ansar* and the SCP after 1965.<sup>5</sup> In this sense, there was a horrible feeling of 'history repeating itself' after the 1985 *Intifada*. Sudanese politics seemed to reproduce an apparently inevitable cycle of events, whereby an initially radical transitional government became slowly less ambitious and eventually ushered in a period of liberal democracy dominated by political parties relying on patrimonialism more than policy; the cynicism this experience generated then made it possible for the military to seize power once more, as it had done in 1969. Nevertheless, we should beware of accepting this cycle of democratic aspiration followed by weary resignation as the principal explanation for Umar al-Bashir's coup of 1989. It is worth remembering that Sadiq al-Mahdi was on the verge of signing a peace deal with Garang that would involve the full cancellation of the September Laws when al-Bashir intervened.<sup>6</sup> What brought about the coup was the NIF's contempt for democracy, and not that of the general public, and it was facilitated by the growing economic and military strength of this particular party.

Umar Abd al-Ati characterizes al-Bashir's pro-NIF military coup of 30 June 1989 as being like 'the revenge of May'.<sup>7</sup> This is in many ways a fitting judgement. The Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) established by al-Bashir's putschists immediately targeted all the forces that had helped to bring about the downfall of the May Regime. The army was systematically purged, with 2,500 officers having been rooted out by 1993, and almost the entirety of the senior police officer cadre was dismissed.<sup>8</sup> Al-Bashir also acted ruthlessly against the civilians who had helped bring about the *Intifada*. Senior members of the major northern political parties were sent to jail, including Muhammad Ibrahim Nuga and Sadiq al-Mahdi, the latter being subjected to a mock execution. The workers' and professionals' unions were purged to an extent never witnessed before, and their members were imprisoned and tortured *en masse*. As seen in Chapter 5, al-Bashir and others in the Islamist cell in the military put particular pressure on Siwar al-Dahab in 1985 to ensure that 'communists' in the professional and labour movement did not seize control of the *Intifada*. In many ways, al-Bashir's coup of 1989 represented a resolution of the power struggles that emerged following the *Intifada*. Awad al-Karim Muhammad Ahmad, who had clashed personally with al-Bashir in 1985, was treated viciously by the new president's security agencies when he took over. Aazim Kabbashi, who had led Nimeiri's torture unit, was re-employed for the same purpose by al-Bashir's regime. It seemed as if the uprisings of 1964 and 1985 had underlined for Sudan's new autocrats the drawbacks of the Sudanese state being 'soft at heart'. Nimeiri had shown an unprecedented willingness to utilize physical violence against fellow members of the riverain elite in 1971; al-Bashir's violent crackdown following the 1989 coup started off where Nimeiri had begun.

Taking stock of the various political forces that featured prominently in 1985 can help us assess the extent to which the Salvation Revolution did represent a 'counter-Intifada'. Of course, it was the leftists, secularists and 'sectarians' associated with the 1985 *Intifada* who were most notably targeted by the post-1989 measures. In spite of the political infighting during the interim and democratic periods amongst the northern political parties, the SPLA and the professionals, following al-Bashir's coup, these groups joined together to form the 'National Democratic Alliance' (NDA) in October 1989, taking the original National Alliance's 'Charter to Protect Democracy' of 1985 as their inspiration.<sup>9</sup> Meanwhile, observing the reactions of the perceived 'pro-Islamists' who participated in the *Intifada* and the transitional regime should enable us to assess the credibility of the argument that the 1986 transitional regime was pro-NIF and paved the way for the 1989 coup. Hussein Abu Salih, the interim minister of health, was probably the most sympathetic to the new order. He served in three ministerial positions in the early 1990s, including the post of Minister of Foreign Affairs from 1993 to 1995.<sup>10</sup> Other 'pro-Islamists' from the 1985 transitional government were favourably treated by the regime, without their being actively incorporated into it. Siwar al-Dahab was allowed to become head of the Islamic Call Organization (*al-Munazzama al-Dawa' al-Islamiyya*),<sup>11</sup> while Taj al-Din Fadl took over the presidency of an Islamist youth organization.<sup>12</sup>

Nevertheless, with the exception of Hussein Abu Salih, the liberal Islamists within the professional elite largely shunned the new regime. Umar Abd al-Ati was not employed by it, and recalls being harassed by the new security agencies, although his close personal relationship with al-Turabi helped him to escape the kind of brutal treatment suffered by the more left-wing professionals.<sup>13</sup> Jizouli Dafa'allah, whilst having been treated leniently by the new rulers, has also distanced himself from the Salvation Revolution. He claims that he refused an offer from Umar al-Bashir to work as Sudan's representative at the UN on the grounds that his regime had been brought about by a military coup.<sup>14</sup> 'I am not an *Ingazi* [i.e. a supporter of the *Ingaz*, or "Salvation Revolution"]', he insists.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, it seems that Mirghani al-Nasri did not play any great political role after 1989, although he was treated sympathetically by the new regime and al-Bashir and Ali Uthman Taha attended his funeral in 2010.<sup>16</sup> This reminds us that a distinct category of 'liberal Islamists', who had little sympathy for the secular and left wing ideologies of a number of their professional contemporaries, and at the same time did not share the NIF's contempt for democracy, participated in the *Intifada*.

The one Islamist professional closely identified with both the uprisings (or in this case, the first one) and the 'Salvation Revolution' was Hasan al-Turabi. Whilst al-Turabi was sent to prison by Umar al-Bashir along with the other political leaders, it is now acknowledged by many – including al-Turabi himself – that this was a ploy to disguise the fact that al-Turabi and the NIF *Shura* council were themselves behind the coup.<sup>17</sup> As seen in previous chapters, the NIF chief was himself a champion of democracy during the 1964 October Revolution and had participated in both the parliamentary regimes brought about by the 1964 and 1985 uprisings. However, by the 1980s and 1990s, he had begun to adopt a far more ambiguous position on democracy. In 1983, he contended that 'an Islamic form of government is essentially a form of representative democracy. But,' he continued, 'this statement requires the following qualification.



First an Islamic republic is not strictly speaking a direct government of and by the people; it is a government of the *shari'ah*. But, in a substantial sense, it is a popular government since the *shari'ah* represents the convictions of the people, and therefore, their direct will.<sup>18</sup> Al-Turabi's belief that his state was 'democratic' was rooted in his somewhat optimistic conviction that his own personal interpretation of *shari'ah* was one shared by the entire Sudanese public. There is some evidence that this conviction was genuine – in 1996 al-Turabi was prepared to test it out by sanctioning multi-party elections in Sudan, but was overruled by senior generals and ministers who did not share his optimism.<sup>19</sup> Al-Turabi is often dismissed as a hypocrite who betrayed his former commitment to democracy by allying with military dictators. However, what this indicates is that al-Turabi shared the same paradoxical beliefs of the more secular branches of the 'modern forces' following the 1964 and 1985 uprisings – that 'democracy' would be implemented after suspending 'democracy' for a period to prevent 'anti-democratic' forces (the 'sectarians' being the culprit in both cases) from exploiting 'democracy' to prevent 'democracy'.

After a decade of largely futile efforts by opposition politicians to unseat the regime, it was inter-Islamist rifts over the precise nature of 'democracy' that set the scene for a readjustment of the nature of political competition in Sudan. In 1996, al-Turabi had chosen to take up the position of speaker in the parliament formed by the largely fraudulent elections of the same year. He had hoped that from this position he would slowly be able to transfer power to the civilian wing of the Islamic Movement and thus escape from his bondage to the military. However, he was caught by surprise when the Salvation Revolution decided, in his own words, to 'eat its father'. Just as he was beginning to introduce legislation that would limit Umar al-Bashir's powers, members of the Islamic Movement issued the famous 'memorandum of the ten' in 1998, which indirectly criticized al-Turabi's leadership and suggested that he transfer a number of his powers to Umar al-Bashir.<sup>20</sup> A year later, al-Bashir dissolved the parliament and drove al-Turabi into opposition, where he formed his own Popular Congress Party to rival the National Congress Party of his erstwhile allies.

The crisis of political Islam undermined the foundations of authoritarian rule in Sudan. Having 'eaten its father', the Islamic Movement lost its ideological coherence. Whilst the outlook of the post-1999 regime remained Islamist in character, the division created a conflict over how exactly the 'Islamic State' was to be established and many began to acknowledge the failings of the original 'civilizational project' of the 1990s.<sup>21</sup> This ideological splintering resulted in the re-emergence of a semi-free print media. As a result of the Islamic Movement's ideological confusion, the security agencies have been unsure as to how to censor the wide range of political and religious views that have emerged following this media liberalization.<sup>22</sup>

At the same time, the ideological rift also furthered regional and ethnic tensions amongst the Islamists. The majority of those remaining loyal to al-Turabi had their origins in the western region of Sudan, whilst the NCP came to represent the interests of the 'riverain centre', and its senior cadres hailed from the Shayqiyya and Jaaliin groups of northern province.<sup>23</sup> This rift partly contributed to the outbreak of rebellion in Darfur in 2003, when – alongside the more secular Sudan Liberation Movement – one of al-Turabi's former lieutenants, Khalil Ibrahim, led the Justice and Equality

Movement into rebellions against the government. Speculation remains as to the extent of the connection between al-Turabi and the JEM. The Darfur rebellion has proved to be costly for the Sudanese government. First, it distracted it to the point that it was compelled to abandon the attempt to dominate the south and consequently made peace with the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army in 2005. Moreover, the regime's brutal counter-insurgency campaign led to the International Criminal Court issuing a warrant for Umar al-Bashir's arrest on charges of crimes against humanity and, later, genocide.

In spite of extricating itself from its over-ambitious project to 'Islamize the south', the regime has failed to offer a political vision that can unite even the portion of Sudan that remains following the secession of the south in 2011. It has remained focused on developing the 'Hamdi Triangle', consisting of the areas of central and riverain Sudan between the towns of Atbara, Kassala and al-Ubayyid. The fact that Abd al-Rahim Hamdi, the Finance Minister whose name this policy is associated with, was one of the *Ikhwani* lecturers who helped drive the October Revolution following the University Incident of 1964, reminds us that the democratic hero of one region of Sudan could be the villain of another. In 2011, al-Bashir declared that following the secession of the south, the Sudanese government would be free to impose its own version of Arab/Islamic identity on the rest of the country. Predictably, the branches of the SPLM/A, which had been left stranded in the north following secession and had been forced to reform as the SPLM/A-North, entered into rebellion against the regime.

For the northern regime, the most serious consequence of the secession of south Sudan has been its loss of oil revenue. With the majority of the country's oil fields located in the now departed south, the northern government lost access to a resource that provided 70 per cent of its revenue.<sup>24</sup> The effects have been predictable – inflation has doubled and production of the major staple foods has declined, making the country increasingly dependent on imports.<sup>25</sup> As of May 2012, even the Finance Minister was acknowledging a poverty rate of 40 per cent, whilst youth unemployment has now risen to 25.4 per cent.<sup>26</sup> It was yet another wave of economic austerity measures that provoked the next series of uprisings. In June 2012, the government's declaration that it was cutting fuel subsidies provoked mass student-led street demonstrations throughout Khartoum.<sup>27</sup> When the state once more attempted to remove fuel subsidies in September 2013, it faced a far more extensive series of protests and its various security units had shot dead over 200 protesters before the demonstrators finally relented.<sup>28</sup> This figure was a far greater number than that of those slain in either 1964 or 1985, suggesting that if any future uprising does succeed in removing al-Bashir's regime, it will be a much bloodier affair.

The narrowing horizons of the NCP, its gradually diminishing inclusive political vision, the economic catastrophes it has presided over and its intensification of the conflict on the periphery have engendered further divisions and crises within the Islamist camp. Most of these rifts are products of policy conflicts over the relationship between the regime and the civilian Islamic Movement, as well as the matter of how to approach the opposition, at both the periphery and the riverain centre. Al-Bashir and a number of hardliners such as Nafie Ali Nafie wish to maintain a strict NCP monopoly on power by treating the Islamic Movement as a branch of the ruling party and by

stepping up the military campaign against the SPLA-North.<sup>29</sup> Meanwhile, a more reformist faction, including a number of military Islamists and former intelligence czar Salah Gosh, objects to the NCP's attempts to establish a monopoly over the Islamic movement, whilst Gosh and the 'Naivasha group' – the civilian Islamists such as Ali Uthman Taha most closely associated with the 2005 peace agreement with the SPLA – advise pursuing a more cautious and conciliatory approach towards the SPLA-North for fear of uniting the various rebel factions in the peripheries.<sup>30</sup> These divisions have also taken on something of an ethnic character, with 'hardliners' from Ja'ali backgrounds such as Nafie and al-Bashir taking on 'moderates' from Shayqi backgrounds such as Gosh, Taha and Awad al-Jaz.<sup>31</sup> The conflict has escalated in recent years with the dismissal of major figures from the NCP. Bashir removed Gosh in April 2011 after a rift between the latter and Nafie over feelers Gosh sent out to the opposition parties, and then had him arrested in 2012, together with a number of military Islamists, after NISS accused them of plotting against the regime.<sup>32</sup> In 2013, it expelled Ghazi al-Atabani, a senior 'reformist' figure, for penning a memo along with two dozen other NCP members demanding that Bashir end his violent crackdown against the uprisings of September 2013.<sup>33</sup>

In spite of the withdrawal of senior Islamists such as al-Atabani, Gosh and al-Turabi from the regime, De Waal maintains that 'the fact that they are not united against the government is a challenge for the opposition.'<sup>34</sup> He further observes that 'In Tunisia, Egypt and Syria in 2011, the Islamists were in opposition and supported the protesters, as indeed they were in the critical moment in Sudan in 1985.'<sup>35</sup> This is in many regards a cogent argument. The fact that the dissidents have struggled to coordinate their opposition to the regime – in the words of el Gizouli, al-Turabi has 'only Schadenfreude to show' towards Salah Gosh since his fall from grace<sup>36</sup> – suggests that it may take a while for a challenge to the NCP from within the Islamic Movement to be effective. However, De Waal is to some extent ignoring that fact that in both 1964 and 1985 there were other 'Islamic' forces guiding the opposition to the government. In both of these uprisings, parties affiliated with Sudan's major religious orders, the *Ansar* and Khatmiyya, played major roles in the political transitions and achieved far greater electoral success than the *Ikhwan*-inspired political parties in the country at large. This evidently distinguishes post-colonial Sudan from post-colonial Egypt, Syria and Tunisia, where neo-revivalist and Sufi-backed religious parties have not had such a significant part to play in the post-colonial politics of the country. To understand the potential for the emergence of an effective oppositional alliance, we must assess the capacity of these particular parties to pose a viable political challenge to the current regime.

### The lingering influence of the 'Sectarians'

Analysts of contemporary Sudan have tended to assume that the 1989 Revolution marked a transitional phase whereby an older, 'sectarian' form of politics was phased out to be replaced by a political duel between the centralizing Islamists of Khartoum and



the rebel movements of the marginalized peripheries. Undeniably, the transformative violence associated with the post-1989 political dispensation did have a major impact on the cushy systems of patrimonialism that had facilitated the hegemony of the *Ansar* and Khatmiyya orders in democratic Sudan. The sheer ideological self-assurance of the NIF and their military proxies left them undaunted by the religious reputations of figures such as Sadiq al-Mahdi and Muhammad Uthman al-Mirghani. That the regime was willing to subject the former to a mock execution and cause the other to suffer two heart attacks in prison following the 1989 coup illustrated its willingness to introduce a new game of politics whereby state force trumped religious heritage.<sup>37</sup> Within the first 2 years following the revolution, the government had dissolved the Khatmiyya Tariqa and nationalized all of its property as well as that of the *Ansar* movement.<sup>38</sup>

Furthermore, the regime has attempted to undermine the system of rural patrimony upon which these orders base their legitimacy. For instance, in South Kordofan, it dissolved the Nazirates that have historically supported the Umma Party and substituted *Amirs* loyal to the NIF.<sup>39</sup> However, it was also the growing power of regionalist movements in the north that led to a relative decline in the power of the Umma and the DUP, whose electoral campaigns were based upon their ability to mobilize mass rural support. In Darfur, rebel movements such as the JEM and the SLA have begun to take over historic Umma power bases, whereas movements such as the Beja Congress and Rashaida Free Lions that had dominated the low intensity conflict against the government in the East have begun to erode DUP support in its traditional heartland.<sup>40</sup>

However, analysts should be wary of downplaying the support still received by the *Ansar* and Khatmiyya orders in Sudan. *Mulid* festivals at the tomb of the historic Khatmiyya patron Sayyid Hassan in Kassala are still mass events. As Gallab has observed, the very fact that the government has put religious discourse at the centre of political life and attempted to impose a uniform religion upon each individual has encouraged the Sudanese to respond by re-affirming their ties to historic religious orders such as the Khatmiyya and *Ansar*, making the NIF/NCP 'keenly aware of the narrowness of their support base'.<sup>41</sup> In 1993, Sadiq al-Mahdi issued a speech challenging the government in front of 200,000 *Ansari* supporters in Omdurman.<sup>42</sup> Given the essentially rural nature of the Umma Party's constituency, and the exponential rise in migration to the towns since the 1970s, the party was able to deploy far more supporters on the streets after 1989 than it could in 1964 in spite of its political disempowerment.

The DUP and, particularly, the Umma also retain significant kudos amongst the Sudanese youth. In coalition with the other major opposition parties, they have continued to contest university elections, which – given the comparatively open nature of campus politics – are perhaps a more genuine guide to party popularity than national elections. These opposition alliances – whether under the banner of the NDA or more recent coalitions – have remained competitive in elections in both Khartoum and the provinces.<sup>43</sup> Whilst it is difficult to judge the precise extent to which the NUP and DUP contributed to these coalition victories, studies conducted by the University of Khartoum before the 2010 elections perhaps offer another indication as to their popularity. Its opinion poll suggested that within the northern provinces

of Sudan (the regions that now form Sudan after the secession of the south in 2011), the DUP and the Umma were losing ground in their traditional heartlands of the east and west, respectively, where, according to the survey, regionalist movements would obtain 93 per cent and 97 per cent of the votes, respectively.<sup>44</sup> However, it also predicted that the NUP should acquire 23 per cent of the vote in the northern region as a whole, although northern support for the DUP had sunk to a paltry 4 per cent.<sup>45</sup> Nevertheless, the statistics regarding the NUP suggest that they still retain a considerable degree of support within the central riverain areas of Sudan where the urban uprisings of 1964 and 1985 were centred. As seen in this thesis, the Umma Party has found it easier to mobilize support against military regimes than the DUP, given that it is less obviously identified with the army than the latter party. Whilst the DUP has traditionally relied on the commercial strength of the Khatmiyya order and it has been easy for the new economic elite associated with the NCP to outbid it in this regard, the Umma/*Ansar* possess a form of cultural and historical capital that dates back to the Mahdī's struggle against the British and Egyptians and which is harder for the current regime to usurp. Residual identification with the historic legacy of the *Ansar* is evident in the protest behaviour of a number of the youth groups that have been involved in recent uprisings against the NCP regime. In the 2012 Sudan Revolts, the youth activists associated with the *Girifina* movement camped out in the Sayyid Abd al-Rahman al-Mahdi mosque in Wad Nubawi in Omdurman, using it as a safe haven during the crack-downs of NISS.<sup>46</sup>

The problem for the Umma and the DUP is that they are capable of effecting regime change only in collaboration with the 'modern forces', whether it be the professional activists of 1985 or youth-based organizations such as *Girifina* of today. In 1985, although it was Umma Party students who helped initiate the demonstrations, Sadiq al-Mahdi was unwilling to declare war on the regime until he was confident of the ability of the professionals and the military to unseat it. Humbling defeats for the *Ansar* in 1970 and 1976 have proved to him that they are incapable of taking on a modern, mechanized army by themselves. The other, consequent problem for al-Sadiq as well as Muhammad Uthman al-Mirghani is that these figures cannot reconcile themselves with the secular political outlook of a number of the professionals with whom the more traditional political parties have previously collaborated to effect regime change. Twice, in 1964 and 1985, religious patriarchs and urban professionals cooperated to unseat military regimes, and on both occasions they subsequently fell into argument over issues such as sectoral representation, the status of the 'Native Administration' and, most significantly, the role of religion in governance and law. Disputes over the latter issue, in particular, have continued to bedevil the opposition parties during both the era of the National Democratic Alliance and the New Dawn Charter. In 1992, the Umma Party refused to sign an NDA manifesto that declared that 'religion is a divine concept between God and the individual, the state is for all citizens.'<sup>47</sup> In 2013, the NUP rapidly backtracked on its decision to sign the New Dawn Charter with a number of other opposition parties in Kampala, following controversy over the inclusion of a clause requiring cancellation of any religiously inspired legislation that might conflict with international human rights law.<sup>48</sup> Along with al-Turabi's PCR, it has now left the 'National Consensus Forces' altogether.<sup>49</sup>

Therefore, mistrust between members of Sudan's major religious orders and the *effendiyya* educated elite remains significant.

Whether out of fear of the lingering popular sympathy for these movements, or a desire to secure 'Islamic' allies following its rift with Hasan al-Turabi in 1999, al-Bashir's NCP government has shown an increasing willingness to mitigate its initial anti-sectarian policy and to attempt to align these parties, or factions of them, with the government. Initially, such moves reflected the sundering of Islamist unity – following the initial split between al-Bashir and al-Turabi in 1999, the president and his former ally scrambled to invite the DUP and the Umma, respectively, to join 'National Reconciliation' projects.<sup>50</sup> When al-Bashir's NCP re-asserted itself, its policies towards the 'sectarians' came closer to representing a classic 'divide and rule' strategy – the appointment of Sadiq al-Mahdi's former stalwart Mubarak al-Fadil al-Mahdi as a Presidential Assistant in 2002 created a long-term rift between the mainstream National Umma Party (NUP) of Sadiq al-Mahdi and Mubarak al-Fadil's Umma Party: Reform and Renewal. Nevertheless, the neo-traditionalist religious orders' rapprochement with the NCP also reflected a mutual interest in stalling the increasing growth of the rebel movements of the periphery as players in the Sudanese political arena. Sadiq al-Mahdi has distanced himself from the slogan of regime change, and expressed fears that if the armed rebel groups in the periphery were to gain access to power, it could lead to a repeat of the Rwandan Genocide in Sudan.<sup>51</sup>

The regime's most significant effort to incorporate the sectarian movements came in 2011, when al-Bashir appointed Jafar al-Sadiq al-Mirghani and Abd al-Rahman al-Mahdi, the sons of the DUP and NUP chiefs, respectively, as Presidential Assistants. In many ways this still represented a policy of factionalizing the opposition – Abd al-Rahman's appointment occurred without the knowledge or blessing of his father.<sup>52</sup> Although Muhammad Uthman al-Mirghani was far more positive about his own son's ascension to the government, the move also caused divisions within the DUP. Some resigned, and others joined the breakaway military wing that had aligned itself with the SRF.<sup>53</sup> As the DUP party committee was convening to sanction Jafar al-Sadiq's participation in the government, members of the DUP Youth movement occupied the garden of the al-Mirghani residence, where the meeting was being held, in defiance of their seniors' decision.<sup>54</sup> The DUP youth action mirrored that of factions of the Umma youth who surrounded a meeting of the NUP political office in the days following the appointment of Abd al-Rahman, demanding that al-Sadiq dismiss his son from office and mobilize party supporters to topple the regime.<sup>55</sup> In 2013, the student wing of the NUP announced its outright refusal to participate in any electoral alliance with the NCP in university elections.<sup>56</sup> With major generational rifts within both the Umma and the DUP, the eventual passing of the two septuagenarian patriarchs, each of whom has dominated his party for over four decades, may usher in a more confrontational phase of politics – although this might be prevented by Bashir's decision to incorporate Jafar al-Sadiq and Abd al-Rahman in his government. However, even if a generational shift does bring more belligerent leaders to the helm of the more 'traditional' parties, they will still need the collaboration of the institutions associated with the 'modern forces' – whether they be the army, students or professional movements – to produce any effective change.



## The assault on the 'modern forces'

As observed above, one reason that De Waal downplays the potential for any 'third Intifada' is that contemporary activists lack the organizational capacity of the previous generation. This is not exactly their fault – it is certainly not, as De Waal seems to imply, because the 1985 generation of activists were more meticulous planners than their twenty-first century successors. As seen in Chapter 4, the National Alliance's activities during the *Intifada* were a great deal more spontaneous than De Waal acknowledges. The reason that today's oppositionists appear less well prepared is that the Salvation Regime has been far more rigorous than its predecessors in denying them access to leadership of the institutions most associated with the 'modern forces' – professional, labour and student unions. In both 1964 and 1985, the 'modern forces' were able to coordinate opposition to the regime because each of the major student unions and professional unions (if not the labour unions) was controlled by groups opposed to the regime. Today's oppositionists are not as fortunate.

Possibly the most significant reason for the longevity of al-Bashir's military regime is the ruthlessness with which it pursued its initial assault on the 'modern forces' that had been the principal protagonists in the 1964 and 1985 uprisings. Soon after instigating the June 1989 military coup, the RCC dissolved the major trade unions and professional associations and arrested each of their heads.<sup>57</sup> When doctors struck in protest in November, al-Bashir famously fulminated that 'anyone who betrays the nation does not deserve the honour of living', and had one doctor executed under emergency legislation to back his point.<sup>58</sup> The sheer extensiveness of the purging of both workers and professionals deemed hostile to the regime was unprecedented in Sudanese history. In 2001, *Al-Sharq al-Awsat* observed that the number of government employees dismissed from service since the Salvation Revolution was 73, 640, more than twice the number fired between 1904 and 1989.<sup>59</sup> Such was the ferocity of the measures adopted by al-Bashir that, despite the post-2005 liberalization measures, the 'modern forces' still possess only a limited capacity to mobilize against the regime.

When the regime did sanction the formation of unions once more, it was via a far more extreme form of Nimeiri's corporatist model. It appointed a General Union of Sudanese Workers and empowered it to oversee trade unions and professional associations, inspect their documents and rewrite the statutes that governed them.<sup>60</sup> Even the Sudan Bar Association, formerly independent, was subjugated to the General Union of Sudanese Workers in this manner.<sup>61</sup> The 1991 Penal Code and 1992 Trade Union Law further restricted the autonomy of individual unions and imposed draconian sanctions on workers taking strike action.<sup>62</sup> Although the regime permitted union elections, it responded to the success of anti-government candidates by permitting itself to appoint a majority of members on each individual board.<sup>63</sup> The result was that every opportunity that had existed under previous military regimes for oppositionists to mobilize the professional or trade unions against the regime was closed off. As a result, although the 'modern forces' continued to participate in demonstrations, they did so with little coherent leadership. Whilst students, civil servants and workers were able to orchestrate protests in Wad Madani and al-Ubayyid in 1994, they lacked the institutions to coordinate these protests and thus struggled to mobilize a more extensive anti-regime campaign.<sup>64</sup>

In theory, the liberal clauses of the 2005 Transitional Constitution that followed the Comprehensive Peace Agreement should have ensured a return to a freer model of associational life. Its terms specifically guaranteed the right to 'peaceful assembly'.<sup>65</sup> However, professionals and labour activists seeking to take back their unions still face the challenge of reversing 16 years of NIF/NCP indoctrination, as well as continuing government obfuscation and manipulation of union elections. For instance, although after 2005 the president of the General Union of Sudanese Workers, Ibrahim Ghandour, agreed in principle with lecturers at Khartoum University that they should have a body to represent their interests, he has used delaying tactics to prevent this union from gaining official recognition.<sup>66</sup> When it launched an unsuccessful three-day strike in 2007 in protest at the laying off of forty-seven lecturers, Ghandour responded with the dismissive statement that 'this union is illegal'.<sup>67</sup>

Meanwhile, the Bar Association has also struggled to unshackle itself from its NIF/NCP-imposed leadership. Until 2009, Fathi Khalil, who had presided over the union since its initial relaunch by the Salvation Regime in 1993, continued to 'win' the leadership elections.<sup>68</sup> Candidates affiliated with a 'National Forces' list dominated by the NCP have triumphed in subsequent elections amidst the usual claims of government manipulation and vote rigging.<sup>69</sup> The result is that the Sudan Bar Association, unlike its predecessor in the 1960s and 1980s, has done little to challenge the government over the major political issues of the day, such as illegal detentions, torture and crimes against humanity in the Darfur conflict.<sup>70</sup>

Perhaps the only professional association that has managed to challenge the regime effectively in the post-2005 political environment is the Doctors' Union. This association officially re-established itself in 2006, using the constitution adopted by its predecessor in 1972 as a framework.<sup>71</sup> In 2009, it acquired an independently minded president, Abd al-Azim Kaballo, who soon challenged the government by launching two major strikes in 2010 and 2011, both of which succeeded in paralysing major hospitals throughout northern Sudan.<sup>72</sup> Commentators were quick to draw comparisons with the 1984 and 1985 medics' strikes that helped to oust Nimeiri, and it was a sign of the regime's less commanding position that after the predictable initial arrests, it chose, like Nimeiri in 1984, to pursue a negotiated solution to the crisis. The Doctors' Union was willing to challenge the government once more during the uprising of September 2013, when its new president Ahmad al-Shaikh was arrested for informing news agencies of the number of protesters slain by the security forces.<sup>73</sup>

The General Union of Sudanese Workers has also threatened strike action recently, although in this case the agenda it is pursuing is more indicative of splits within the NCP than a resurgence of labour activism. In 2012, its head, the leading NCP official Ibrahim Ghandour, warned that his union would launch nationwide industrial action if his demands for an increase in the minimum wages were not met. However, these demands appear to be the product of a policy conflict between himself and the finance minister Ibrahim Abd al-Rasul.<sup>74</sup> When Khartoum hospital workers proposed strike action in early 2014, the GUSW warned its members not to participate.<sup>75</sup>

The marginalization of the labour and professional unions within the anti-regime struggle can easily be demonstrated through a cursory study of the 2013 New Dawn Charter. The principal signatories include six members of the SRJ, as well as six

members of the National Consensus Forces – a coalition of the old northern political parties, which has effectively replaced the NDA. The signatories also include youth groups, women's movements, 'civil society' and 'national figures'. A movement entitled 'Trade Union Solidarity' is listed as being a party to the NCF but this institution itself largely comprises the pre-1989 political parties and, in spite of the presence of an 'executive committee for the dismissed', there is little evidence that the NCF intends to push the kind of demands that the Professional Front did in 1964. The Charter does propose a 4-year interim period, signifying that those such as Farouk Abu Eissa who had participated in previous regime changes were aware that previous transitions had failed on account of having been too short.<sup>76</sup> However, there is little evidence that the 'modern forces' plan to use this period to empower themselves in the same way that they had attempted to during the 1964 and 1985 transitions. There is no demand for sectoral representation of the 'modern forces' at elections, and the most specific of all the demands is that the current union legislation be repealed and 'replaced with new democratic laws'.<sup>77</sup> The stipulations regarding the distribution of power in the transitional government are vague – the document simply observes that 'the participant[s] shall be from all political parties, civil society organizations, women and youth who ... ratified this document in addition to independent national figures'.<sup>78</sup> Little is done, therefore, to resolve pre-emptively the kind of conflict between parties and unions that resulted in the disempowerment of the latter during the previous transitions.

The one branch of the 'modern forces' that the regime has struggled to retain a hold on is the student sector. This is partly a result of its ideological self-confidence backfiring on it. Since the Islamic Movement's student wing had won the majority of student elections in the period leading up to 1989, the Salvation Regime initially assumed that it would not have to control campus politics as rigorously as it did other areas of associational life. It failed to predict the reaction that its policy of introducing fees for accommodation and other living expenses would provoke. In the 1990 and then the 1991 round of KUSU elections, the 'National Democratic Forum', which combined SCP, Umma and DUP students, seized the union by exploiting the resentment caused by the withdrawal of free education.<sup>79</sup> The regime responded to the new union's anti-NIF policies by deploying security forces on campus and cancelling the 1992 student elections.<sup>80</sup> In 1993, the pro-NIF student group won by a narrow margin amidst claims of vote rigging and proceeded to dominate campus politics through the rest of the 1990s.<sup>81</sup>

Since the beginning of the new millennium, KUSU has been the only major civil society institution in which the anti-regime political forces have enjoyed a sustained period of hegemony. Between 2003 and 2008, an opposition alliance of Umma- and DUP-affiliated students, Ba'athists, Communists and Darfuris identifying with Abd al-Wahid Nur's SLM controlled KUSU, winning four elections.<sup>82</sup> Given the relative integrity of KUSU elections – at least compared with elections at the national level – they are potentially more useful for gauging trends within Sudanese political life than regular polls. For instance, the election of KUSU's first female president during one of these elections indicates that Sudanese women are still capable of asserting themselves in the political arena in spite of the Islamist hegemony in the North.<sup>83</sup> As mentioned above, the *Ansar* youth's rejection of any compromise with the NCP has



been demonstrated through their refusal to ally with them in university elections. At the same time, the increasing competitiveness of Salafist student parties in KUSU elections indicates that they may soon – like their counterparts in the post-Arab Spring elections in Egypt – become major players in the political arena.<sup>84</sup>

Since 2009, the NCP-affiliated student body, the 'National Forces', has regained control of KUSU on behalf of the regime – although, ironically, on the basis of just one completed election. Regulations stipulating that polls must witness a 50 per cent turnout to be valid have ensured that the 'National Forces' have maintained control over the union by default since this point. The result has been that the more politicized youth have resorted to direct action to pursue their goals. Many have joined independent youth movements such as *Girifina* or ChangeNow, or Islamist equivalents that have received less attention in the Western media.<sup>85</sup> These groups featured prominently during the 2012 and 2013 uprisings. At the same time, in spite of the NCP control over KUSU, the Khartoum University campus continued to act as a site of student protest during the civil unrest of 2012 and 2013 and was subjected to numerous closures and police invasions.<sup>86</sup> Pro-SRF students, now alienated from the official union, have also clashed with pro-NCP students and regime militias in recent times, culminating in the death of the Darfuri student Abu Bakr Moussa following another police raid on 12 March 2014.<sup>87</sup>

Violent clashes between pro-NCP and pro-SRF students may herald a situation in which the conflict in the periphery will begin to dictate the nature of the conflict at the political centre. However, it is the very fear that this might occur that has given rise to trepidation amongst the political forces that have helped to guide previous *Intifadas*.

## Centre and the periphery

The reason that conservatives within the riverain elite now fear attempting to recreate the experiences of 1964 and 1985 is not simply that they feel the failings of these uprisings will be repeated. Rather, their concern is that the balance between centre and periphery has changed to such an extent that if another *intifada* does break out, they will no longer be able to control the role that the marginalized peoples play in it. This, as seen above, is one of the reasons that De Waal believes Khartoum's urbanites may fear staging a third uprising. Jizouli Dafaallah, a political moderate who was willing to side with the radicals in 1985, observed in 2012 that 'first the conditions for an *intifada* are not present as far as the unity of the opposition forces are concerned ... in addition to the fact that there are conflicts in South Kordofan and Blue Nile, and in these circumstances and with the proliferation of arms, and thus any attempt to engage in activity that uses violence could lead to the tearing apart and partition of Sudan'.<sup>88</sup> It is worth remembering that in 1985, the security agencies had tried to deter the riverain elites from mobilizing against the regime by inculcating the fear that the marginalized people present in Khartoum would provoke violence and anarchy. This strategy proved ineffective in 1985, but it might not now. De Waal has criticized the SRF for playing into the NCP regime's hands by demanding the dismantling of the Sudanese army as a condition of any political transition, thus giving the government 'an opportunity it has

used repeatedly and without hesitation invoking the spectre of armed opposition and promising that if the uprising were to succeed, Sudan might disintegrate or descend into sectarian conflict like Syria.<sup>90</sup>

Former oppositionists now lament the dangers involved in provoking an uprising given that the capital is surrounded by armed gangs with no 'national feeling' (*huss watani*),<sup>91</sup> or rather, by armed former inhabitants of Sudan's rural peripheries unable to identify with the narrow definition of Sudanese nationalism provided by the riverain elite. As seen above, Sadiq al-Mahdi has begun to shy away from advocating regime change via popular uprising for fear of empowering rebel groups on the periphery.<sup>92</sup> Al-Turabi, even though he openly calls for a third *Intifada*, admits 'Sudan is not a nation, there is a breakdown of authority in every tribe everywhere, centrifugal forces may develop ... here the people are well armed, the Nuba, in South Kordofan, they are in arms now, the Beja, Isaia [Awferki, the President of Eritrea] now is allowing any Beja from eastern Sudan to be trained against the government.'<sup>93</sup> Al-Turabi maintains that the regime should still be toppled through civil action, but 'then we have to watch out, control it soon enough, if you let it go on like Syria others may come in, and then Sudan, like Yugoslavia, will break up.'<sup>94</sup>

The participation of the SRF in the signing of the New Dawn Charter highlights the challenges that the increasing empowerment of 'peripheral' political groups will pose to an effective transition in Sudan. In 1964 and 1985, the transitions failed to bring about comprehensive democracy because the centre was unable to engage rebel groups operating in the marginalized south. Today, the NDA and its successor the NCF have succeeded in bringing the rebel groups into political coalitions. The JEM, SLM and SPLM-N leaders all have signed the New Dawn Charter. However, the participation of political forces representing the marginalized people in any future interim government will make any regime change a much more severely contested affair. The 1964 and 1985 transitions represented shifts of power within the riverain elite – some government ministries were purged and former regime stalwarts imprisoned for relatively brief periods, but no fundamental change occurred in the regional structure of power. It seems unlikely that the SPLM-N and, particularly, the JEM and SLM will settle for as much should a regime change occur in 2014. The New Dawn Charter stipulates that it will be the task of the new government to 'engage in positive co-operation with the International Criminal Court and hand down those wanted criminals to be prosecuted.' It holds that those responsible for 'genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes' should be prosecuted in Sudan as well as internationally, whilst proposing that denial that Bashir's regime committed a genocide in Darfur should itself be regarded as a crime.<sup>95</sup> Whilst South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission is cited as a model, the Charter is also clear that any identification with this process should not mean 'exemption from punishment'.<sup>96</sup> These provisions give officers in NISS, PDF, SAF and other institutions, as well as civilians involved in the formulation of the 'Darfur policy', an extra incentive to hang on to power, and suggest that Sudan's third military regime may not unravel as smoothly or as bloodlessly as either of the previous two. Nevertheless, it is also the relationship between these various security units that will play a crucial role in determining the potential for political transition in Sudan.

## Guarding June against October: The security forces and the Salvation Revolution

The architects of the Salvation Revolution had seen in 1964 and 1985 that the great irony of military coups in Sudan is that the military, or at least the regular military recruited on a professional basis, cannot be trusted to safeguard the regimes they usher in; neither can the regular police. Like Nimeiri's May Regime, the NIF and, later, the NCP were thus quick to establish bodies parallel to the regular security institutions, although they had learnt from the demise of the Sudan Security Organization in 1985 that they would have to tip the balance even further in favour of the politicized security units. In the early 1990s, Turabi spoke quite candidly of his intention to replace the army with the Popular Defence Forces (PDF), envisaged by the NIF as the Salvation's citizen army. The great irony of the PDF is that whilst they are often understood as an imposition of the NIF, they also represented its inheritance of the failed policies of the previous parliamentary regime, incorporating as they did the ethnic militias established by Sadiq al-Mahdi to wage war in south Sudan and the Nuba Mountains. Thus the establishment of the PDF exacerbated an already developing process of national fragmentation.

Meanwhile, the new regime tipped the military-intelligence service conflict that had been such a significant factor in 1985 decisively in favour of the intelligence services. Whilst purging the officer corps of the military, the regime radically expanded the intelligence services, staffing them with both re-hired SSO agents and NIF intelligence gurus, such as Salah Gosh and Nafie Ali Nafie. In spite of their historic links with the NIF, most of these lynchpins of the intelligence apparatus were willing to betray Hasan al-Turabi and side with al-Bashir in 1999, helping him to establish what Gallab terms his *verkhushka*, or 'pinnacle of power'.<sup>96</sup> Since this point, a bewildering array of parallel security institutions have proliferated. The Ja'ali section of the government has reportedly established a unit called the 'Precious Stones', drawn from the Ja'ali regions of the northern Nile, a further indication of the ethnicization of the government's security forces.<sup>97</sup> In 2011, al-Bashir declared the formation of a 'Strategic Unit', which combined the most dedicated members of the PDF, army, police, Popular Police, and youth militias that would defend Khartoum against a potential uprising.<sup>98</sup>

His government has adopted a similar two-pronged strategy to marginalize the existing police force. First, it purged the upper echelons of the regular police force and replaced them with Islamists; second, it developed its own police apparatus in parallel to the regulars. The military junta that became known as the Revolutionary Command Council dismissed around 400 police officers in two purges in 1989, including the commissioner and all four of his deputies.<sup>99</sup> These actions occurred simultaneously with purges of the rest of the riverain professional elite, demonstrating that these police officers posed a similar threat to the incoming *putschists*. At the same time, the new government granted police powers to a series of parallel bodies, including the Popular Police (*al-shurta al-sha'abiyya*), who were in effect an extension of the NIF party apparatus and the new intelligence units.<sup>100</sup>

In spite of the various purges to which the force was subjected, the police remained reluctant to serve as the political arm of the state. Two attempts by anti-regime protesters



in September 1995 and September 1996 to repeat the 1985 *Intifada* once more brought the conflict with the government to a head. Large sections of the force clearly resented being required to coerce the public on behalf of the government, particularly since they were called upon to do so in coordination with NIF militias and the Popular Police. During and after these events, the government launched two more purges of the police, the second coming in September 1996 after eighty officers went on strike complaining that they were being blamed by the public for killing protesters, and that they were being marginalized by the Popular Police.<sup>101</sup> It is noteworthy, however, that immediately after the first purge, the government returned to service fourteen officers who had previously been dismissed, demonstrating that it had at least some level of reliance on these skilled professionals.<sup>102</sup> Nevertheless, the state has slowly been able to manipulate legislation so as to increase its control over the police. In 2008, it revised the police law so as to empower NCP-affiliated state governors to nominate candidates for the position of police commandant, dismissing a series of officers who protested against these measures.<sup>103</sup> According to correspondence released by Wikileaks in 2011, the police now report not directly to the minister of interior but to the vice-president and senior Islamist party figure, Ali Uthman 'Taha, via a private firm called the Nasr company.<sup>104</sup>

De Waal downplays the possibility that security forces might reprise the role that they played in the 1964 and 1985 uprisings. He argues that it is unlikely they will side against the regime because 'the most recent military promotions have brought a cadre of Islamist-orientated officers to the most senior ranks', and 'because the army is at war' with the SRF.<sup>105</sup> On the other hand, it was not the most senior ranks that drove the military participation in the 1964 and 1985 uprisings, but the middle and junior ranks. Furthermore, in 1985, an 'Islamist-orientated' general, Siwar al-Dahab, was pressured into action against the regime by the middle and junior ranks. Since, as De Waal himself acknowledges, the Islamic movement is divided, even if only a part of the Islamic movement sides with a potential uprising, it is possible that 'Islamist-orientated' generals might choose this faction. Islamists interviewed by the International Crisis Group suggested that Bashir lacks support among this particular cadre of officers.<sup>106</sup> One eventuality might be a replay of the scenario that occurred in 1985, in which the senior and middle-ranking military Islamists pressure the military command to remove al-Bashir, warning them that continuing to back a destabilizing regime might risk the SRF or the northern secularist parties gaining control of any future *Intifada*.

As for De Waal's observation that the army is at war, this was also the case in 1964 and 1985. However, the extension of the 'conflict in the periphery' since 1985 to Darfur, the Nuba Mountains and even Khartoum (briefly) in 2008 has made it seem a lot closer to home than the original wars in the south. Senior generals might be far less willing to run the risk of a repeat of the 1985 scenario, when their distraction in politics enabled John Garang to score a number of significant victories. At the same time, a number of senior generals are extremely anxious about the potential of what they see as an unjustified conflict in the Blue Nile, Nuba Mountains and Darfur regions to spread discontent in the rank and file, a considerable number of whom hail from these peripheral regions. It has been rumoured that several generals wrote to Bashir advising him to end the conflict in Kordofan and Blue Nile Province, and that Bashir

retired eighty officers as a result.<sup>107</sup> At the same time, regular police forces in the major riverain towns are continuing to rely on recruits from the marginalized peri-urban regions of Khartoum, and as the conflict in the peripheries intensifies, it will be interesting to observe what effect this has on the willingness of central police units to act as guardians of the regime.<sup>108</sup>

However, we must consider not simply the question of whether the police and army would be willing in principle to back any potential *Intifada*, but also that of whether they are sufficiently well equipped to take on the regime's parallel security units. The latter remain under the control of Nafie Ali Nafie and intelligence chief Muhammad Atta Fadl al-Mula, both of whom remain very close to Bashir. Given the eagerness of potential post-*Intifada* governments to prosecute the perpetrators of the regime's various war crimes, it is likely that both NISS and the other parallel forces, which have been far more directly involved in the Darfur counter-insurgency than the regular army, will have a motive to fight to keep the current regime in place even if this involves open confrontation with the regular security forces. Moreover, the regime has deliberately kept the majority of SAF units deployed in Darfur and along the north-south border whilst using parallel forces or the 'precious stones' to patrol the capital, precisely because it recalls the role played by the army and the police in sheltering demonstrators in Khartoum from SSO violence in 1985.<sup>109</sup>

## Conclusion

There is no denying the logic behind Alex de Waal's sceptical assessment of the potential for a 'third *Intifada*'. In spite of its internal factionalism and ideological malaise, the current regime has largely prevented the reappearance of the various factors that facilitated the first two uprisings. Before any coalition akin to the Professional Front or Union Alliance can be formed, professional activists will have to reclaim their various unions from the leaderships sponsored by the government, and amongst the most significant professional bodies, only the doctors have shown any signs of achieving this. In spite of their successes between 2003 and 2008, student oppositionists have also failed to reclaim KUSU from the regime. Without the ability to link up with the major student and professional bodies possessed by their predecessors, the National Consensus Forces are relatively toothless. Moreover, the balance of power between the security units sponsored by the regime and the regular military is now far more clearly tilted in favour of the former; with the vast majority of its units deployed well away from the capital, it is unlikely that the SAF will be able to simply swoop into intelligence headquarters and arrest its personnel, as it did in 1985. Any future *Intifada* is, therefore, unlikely to be as swift or as bloodless as the first two or even the Tunisian or Egyptian Revolutions – the regime's specialized security units killed over 200 protesters during the September 2013 uprising, and this did not come anywhere close to a repeat of the feats of 1964 and 1985. Moreover, the riverain urbanites who felt secure in backing the 1964 and 1985 uprisings may not be willing to chance such a prolonged period of urban struggle, fearing that this may empower armed groups operating within the urban peripheries which are linked to Sudan's various rebel factions.

There are, nevertheless, sufficient chinks in the regime's armour to make it unwise to rule out the possibility of a third uprising. De Waal's observation that any revolt is unlikely to succeed since – in contrast to those elsewhere during the Arab Spring – Sudan's Islamic Movement is not united against the government as its equivalents were in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya in 2011 requires qualification. After all, the Islamic Movement in 1985 was far less divided than it is at present, and it remained on the side of the government up until a month before its downfall. Moreover, it is important to observe that no one political party or movement has a monopoly on political Islam in Sudan – during the 1985 *Intifada* a number of the major figures within the National Alliance identified with Islamist political philosophies but not Turabism. Although none of the 'liberal Islamists' such as al-Nasri, al-Ati, Jizouli Dafa'allah or Siwar al-Dahab have identified openly with the NDA or its successors since 1989, it may be that a similar series of 'compromise figures' will emerge within a future interim government to make the transition acceptable to the Islamic Movement. Perhaps Youssef al-Koda of the al-Wasat Islamist party, which signed the New Dawn Charter in Kampala in 2013, could be one such figure.<sup>110</sup> Moreover, none of the other countries that witnessed the 'Arab Spring' in 2011 possess a neo-revivalist movement carrying as much weight as the *Ansar/Umma*. Protests against the Salvation Regime have illustrated the continuing resonance of the Mahdist legacy. It may be that once Sadiq al-Mahdi's increasingly conservative, five-decade-long hegemony over the *Ansar/Umma* comes to an end, new leaderships will be much more willing to enter into confrontation with the regime.

Whilst the security forces facing today's oppositionists are far more entrenched than their predecessors in 1985, in Libya, Tunisia and Egypt protesters were able to successfully launch uprisings against the intelligence services of authoritarian systems in place for twice as long as the regime of al-Bashir. Whilst leading oppositionists do not control the major student and professional associations as they did in 1964 and 1985, these institutions were not as crucial to the 2011 Arab Spring as they have historically been to civil protest in Sudan. Although De Waal argues that today's internet activists and acephalous youth groups lack the organizational skills of bodies such as the National Alliance, these groups featured more prominently in the 2011 protests than any institution akin to the National Alliance. *Girifina* and similar organizations may replace the professionals' and students' unions as the natural allies of the opposition parties in any future *Intifada*. However, lacking the technocratic expertise and political maturity offered by the professionals in 1964 and 1985, and with a political charter that is relatively unclear on a number of issues relating to a future transition, today's oppositionists will likely find managing any change a chaotic affair.



## Conclusion

Why is it that the Sudanese public were able to overhaul two military governments and establish liberal democracies in their place in an era when autocracy was the norm? First, it is important to recall the nature of the regimes that were overhauled, as well as that of the military institutions that stood behind them. In the wider Middle East between the 1960s and 2000s, the corporate identity of the military and the tenacity with which military leaders held on to power tended to militate against the likelihood that established regimes would be overthrown by purely civil action. The situation in Sudan is somewhat different. This study has proved the continuing relevance of Woodward's observation that the Sudanese army acts as a 'mirror of society'. Both in 1964 and 1985, the fact that army and police officers hailed from the same homogeneous urban elite as the professional activists and party leaders who spearheaded the uprisings dictated against the security forces using extreme violence to keep the incumbent government in place. As a result of the social and cultural inter-linkages between the branches of the security establishment and other sectors within the northern riverain elite, it has been a very risky strategy for Sudan's rulers to play the various security organs off against each other. Nimeiri learnt this to his cost in 1985, when the oppositionists who led the April *Intifada* exploited the divide he had fostered between the army and the SSO.

Were the first and second military regimes really brought down by committed pro-democracy activism, or by more structural weaknesses that oppositionists exploited but did not create? It is easier to claim the former when discussing the first of the two uprisings, since Abboud's government had appeared relatively compact up until the point of his downfall, and Sudan was not facing the kind of economic crisis it was in 1985. The Muslim Brotherhood and the Sudan Communist Party had been active in plotting the downfall of the military regime in the years before the October Revolution, although neither was able to fully dictate the manner in which the eventual uprising unfolded. Although al-Qurayshi's martyrdom and the series of events that followed were determined to some extent by the plans that these two parties had laid, they were still in many other respects highly spontaneous in nature. Both of the principal opposition fronts, the United National Front and the Professional Front, were formed during the revolution and not before it. It is fair to say that Abboud, being bereft of the 'degree in obstinacy' that would characterize later dictators, played a significant role in the peaceful conclusion of the Revolution by giving in to the demonstrators' demands as quickly as he did. However, the sheer extent of the demonstrations and the comprehensive success of the general strike indicated that this was no ordinary transfer of power.

The case was somewhat different in 1985. When the regime fell, it had already been severely weakened not just by the catastrophic economic situation but also by Nimeiri's own breakdown and his consequent self-destructive policies. In the period leading up to Nimeiri's downfall, the various political parties had been active against the regime, but not in a particularly coordinated manner. In spite of the fact that Nimeiri's ouster had loomed far more obviously than Abboud's did, they were unable to establish a single political front in the years leading up to his downfall. While the professional groups had shown an impressive degree of coherence in the year leading up to the Revolution and had conducted strikes that had brought the regime to its knees, they responded to the *Intifada* in a somewhat spontaneous and frenetic manner. In this sense, it is probably fair to say that the emergence of a civil movement favouring a return to democracy was not the principal cause of Nimeiri's downfall. What it did achieve was to ensure that there would be no straightforward transfer of power to another military autocrat favoured by one of the global superpowers.

It is highly significant that many of the 'democrats' of 1964 and 1985 espoused one form or another of political Islam. One key theme that this book has attempted to illustrate is the folly of defining anti-regime uprisings in the Islamic world as either 'secular' and 'democratic' events based on 'civil society' that rely on imported European leftist and liberal thought, or 'religious', 'anti-democratic' movements driven by political Islam. It is important to remember that during 1964 and 1985 the *khutbas* in mosques and religious funeral ceremonies were utilized by oppositionists to mobilize anti-regime activity at the same time as secular spaces such as football grounds, public squares, university campuses and walls upon which anti-regime slogans were daubed.

It is difficult to deny that the 'modern forces' played a more critical role in the uprising than any openly religious organization. As we have seen, the Sudanese term 'modern forces' often equates to what European political scientists term 'civil society' – forms of association separated from the state, such as student bodies, and workers' and professional unions. However, a considerable number of those who represented the 'modern forces' during the 1964 and 1985 uprisings identified with various types of political Islam – Hasan al-Turabi, Muhammad Salih Umar, Rabie Hasan Ahmad, Anwar Nur al-Hadi, Umar Abd al-Ati, Hussein Abu Salih, Mirghani Nasri and Jizouli Dafa'allah, to name a few. Some were active members of the Muslim Brotherhood (although not in 1985), while others were ex-members who still sympathized with the same ideals (Jizouli Dafa'allah), or ex-members who had established their own, more liberal 'Islamist' parties (Mirghani al-Nasri), or simply believed that Islam should play some role in law and politics (Umar Abd al-Ati). The majority of these people espoused during the 1964 and 1985 uprisings the values that are now associated with 'post-Islamism', including a commitment to developing democratic values and political liberties within an Islamic framework. Of course, Hasan al-Turabi in particular has been accused of disingenuousness many times, openly betraying as he did his commitment to the democratic ideal by allying himself with Jafar Nimeiri in 1977 and Umar al-Bashir in 1989. However, it is worth noting that his decision to express regret over his military alliances and commit himself to democratic politics reflects a return to the values he espoused in 1964 just as much as it illustrates his desire to ride the 'post-Islamist' wave.

Acknowledging the role played by advocates of Islam within the 'modern forces' does not mean denying the agency of their secular, leftist, liberal and Arab nationalist counterparts. While *Ikhwan* lecturers and an *Ikhwan*-led KUSU may have played the most significant role in the crucial seminars that sparked the October Revolution at the University of Khartoum, it was the communists and their sympathizers in the professional and workers' unions who would push the general strike towards a successful conclusion and exercise a significant influence in the first transitional government. While the SCP may have been a broken force in 1985, it is still true that a number of the leading professionals who constituted the National Alliance sympathized with left-wing ideology. At the same time, it is worth noting that although the Sudanese political arena has since the decline of Arabism and Nasserism come to be characterized as a Manichaean duel between Communist and Islamist ideologies, in both 1964 and 1985, men who were committed to the more secular forms of Arab nationalism also played their role as a part of the 'modern forces'. In 1964, the Free Officer movement was more of an Arab nationalist organization than a left-wing one, and a number of the interim ministers labelled as 'communists', such as Khalafallah Babikir, identified with Egypt more closely than they did with Russia. The man who some say proposed the general strike in 1964 was not a communist but a Ba'athist, Shawgi Mallasi. While the Sudan branch of the Ba'ath Party may have entered a period of comprehensive decline following the measure al-Bashir took against the army Ba'athists after the failed Ramadan coup of 1990, in 1985 it was highly active as a political force and was probably more effectively involved in anti-regime mobilization than the SCP.

It is often assumed that there is a natural divide between communism, Arab nationalism and 'Islamism', but during October 1964 and the transitional period that followed it, the proponents of these ideologies often espoused broadly similar revolutionary aims. Each of these groupings had opposed a military regime that had made little effort to identify with any particular ideology; they all maintained a commitment to social transformation and a 'cleansing' of the old political order; and they all agreed upon the principle of dismantling the Native Administration. It is also important to remember that the leaderships of each of these various groupings hailed from the same homogenous northern urban elite and thus tended to share the vision of the Sudanese nation that was embraced by this elite. While the notion of the 'Sudanese nation' has been heavily deconstructed by academics as a result of the emergence of separatist movements in the peripheries, in this era the urban intellectuals of Khartoum maintained a firm attachment to it, just as much as they did to their own ideological precepts. This is why al-Turabi refused to refer to his movement as the 'Muslim Brotherhood', preferring to see it as a Sudanese party rather than a branch of a wider ideological movement.

It was not until the paranoia that surrounded the events of the 'night of the barricades' on 9 November 1964 that the Islamists broke decisively with the communists in the Professional Front. In 1985, the divide was more stark from the outset, since the ICF was left out of the Alliance on account of its recent collaboration with the May Regime and refusal to enter a coalition that included the SCP. The non-ICF Islamists in the Alliance also came to heads with the leftists and the secularists at a very early stage over the issue of the September Laws. However, this does not undermine the fact



that Islamists, secularists and liberals had cooperated closely to establish the National Alliance and overthrow Nimeiri.

If we are to critique the notion that the 1964 and 1985 uprisings were the product of a civilian, secular urban elite, we must also analyse the role played by Sudan's 'sectarian' parties – the PDP, NUP, DUP and, particularly, the Umma Party. While it is true that the political parties with closer links to the 'modern forces' probably played a more decisive part in the uprisings, the role of these parties was not as marginal as is often assumed. In October 1964, the presence of Sadiq al-Mahdi guaranteed the success of al-Qurayshi's funeral procession. These parties had closer ties to the students' unions than is usually acknowledged, and it is probably the case that the Umma Party helped to inspire the demonstration that was led by the students of Omdurman Islamic University on 26 March 1985, and provided the initial spark for the April *Intifada*.

In fact, these parties have tended to stick more rigidly to the principle of 'one man, one vote' than their leftist, Arab nationalist and radical Islamist counterparts within the riverain elite whose reliance on narrow urban support bases has tended to militate against their sympathizing with the principle of liberal democracy. Indeed, the fact that the more ideological groups have fared so badly in multi-party elections explains why they eschewed the liberal democratic principles they espoused in October 1964 so readily by supporting the military coups of 1969 and 1989. As we have seen, Babikir Awadallah and a number of senior Professional Front figures joined Nimeiri's 'May Regime' in 1969, while al-Turabi, the man whose calls for political liberalization in the Khartoum University exam hall had given the October Revolution its initial impetus, collaborated with Umar al-Bashir to overthrow the third democratic regime. In this sense, the line between 'democrats' and 'autocrats' is a weakly defined one. At the same time, there were also those whose commitment to the democratic ideal was less shallow. It was only a minority within the SCP and a minority within the FOO that backed the Free Officer coup of 1969, while, as seen before, a number of the members of the 1985–6 transitional government who were committed to the ideal of political Islam did not support al-Bashir's coup.

If we are to understand why the 1964 and 1985 uprisings failed to generate long-term democratic change in Sudan and, indeed, why Sudan failed to revisit the experiences of October and April in 2011 when so many other regimes in the Middle Eastern region were successfully overthrown by civil protest movements, it is essential to look at the role that Sudan's oft-mooted 'centre-periphery dynamic' played in the uprisings. The uprisings were brought about by political forces operating within social centres of Sudanese society, specifically within the developed urban regions of the riverain north. It is important to understand that the political, social and economic situation in Sudan's rural peripheries helped to define the manner in which power struggles at the centre played out in 1964 and 1985, the manner dictated by the northern riverain elite. Factions within the riverain elite have always been able to exploit the chaotic situation in the rural periphery to serve their own agenda at the centre.

Hasan al-Turabi's decision to transform a debate on the 'southern question' into a criticism of authoritarianism in the north, which helped spark the October Revolution but did little to resolve the inequalities between north and south, offers a clear example

of this tendency of 'central' politicians to use the struggles of the periphery for their own purposes. Nevertheless, during the Revolution and the transitional period that followed it, there were flashes of hope that seemed to indicate that the old pattern of 'centre and periphery' might be broken. At one stage, the appointment of Clement Mboro as minister of interior seemed to offer a hope that the progressives in the north would be able to help southerners obtain a voice right at the centre of Sudanese politics, but Mboro's position was soon weakened by the events of 6 December 1964. The Black Sunday riots demonstrated that conflict in the peripheries could have resonances in Khartoum, but their only practical impact was to isolate Mboro and rigidify the outlook of the conservative majority in the north.

Admittedly, the October Revolution – in spite of its capital origins – at one stage offered a great deal to the peoples of provincial Sudan, at least in the north. Provincial populations all over the north, even in Darfur, identified with the slogans of the revolution, clashed with local branches of the armed forces, established their own branches of the 'Professional Front' and launched mini-campaigns against the existing social, political and administrative order. However, the urban radicals of 1964 were ultimately unable to breach the social gulf between centre and periphery sufficiently enough to disrupt the patrimonial social networks that empowered Sudan's more conservative northern political parties, such as the NUP, PDP and, particularly, the Umma. The Umma Party was able to exploit this failure by marching its own supporters from the rural peripheries of the north into Khartoum to force a change in the composition of the interim government and effectively de-radicalize the revolution.

The pattern of relations between 'centre' and 'periphery' in 1985 was not dissimilar to that which had obtained in 1964, although at this stage political debates focused on the woes of east, west and south instead of just the south. There were a far greater number of 'marginalized' people attempting to subsist within the urban centre, and while they contributed to the *Intifada*, they did so in a manner dictated by the educated riverain northerners who marshalled their demonstrations. Though the re-introduction of parliamentary democracy facilitated the re-emergence of regionalist political parties, its practical impact was to re-empower the riverain, professional elites who had guided the uprisings. While the uprisings spread to the principal northern cities, it tended to be the local technocrats hailing from the riverain areas who took the central role and as such it is difficult to characterize these events in any way as 'regional uprisings'. Meanwhile, the inability of the National Alliance to forge effective cooperation with John Garang's SPLA rebels in the south ensured that, like the October Revolution, the 1985 *Intifada* would fail to cross the divide between the affluent urban centres and the marginalized rural periphery.

Today's would-be imitators of Sudan's glorious revolutionary past know that if they are to achieve what their predecessors failed to do and establish a firmly entrenched democracy following their uprising, they must succeed in bridging both the gap between 'centre and periphery' and that between the secular and Islamist political forces. It is certainly possible that a future *Intifada* will succeed without resolving the conflicts between the marginalized and central regions, and the conflict between those who advocate *shari'a* and those that do not – this was, of course, the case

in 1964 and 1985. However, unless they are able to establish political compromises that satisfy these competing interest groups, any 'third *Intifada*' is likely to repeat the failings of the first two and establish a frail democracy that will be overthrown by an authoritarian regime similar to that of Abboud, Nimeiri or al-Bashir. Nostalgists for October and April must learn from their inadequacies, just as much as trying to reproduce their successes.



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# Notes

## Introduction

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## Chapter 1

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- 32 Northern historians tend to attribute the unwillingness of southerners to embrace the vision of the Sudanese nation offered by the northern elite to the policies pursued by Sudan's British colonizers, which supported Christian missionary education in the region and fostered the notion of separate development from the rest of the country. In contrast, Western historians and southern Sudanese nationalists tend to argue that it was caused by the cultural distinctiveness of the south and the legacy of the nineteenth-century slave raids launched from Khartoum.
- 33 Douglas H. Johnson, *Root Causes of Sudan's Civil Wars* (Oxford: James Currey, 2003), 31.
- 34 Johnson, 30–1.
- 35 Johnson, 30–1.
- 36 Johnson, 31.
- 37 Ahmad Ali Baggadi, 'Thawra Oktober wa al-ahzab min farat hubbhum laha akalaha (2)', *Al-Ra'i al-'Aam* 25 October 2011.
- 38 Baggadi, 'Thawra'.
- 39 Baggadi, 'Thawra'.
- 40 Daly and Holt, 178. Fadl Hasan, 505.
- 41 Fadl Hasan, 505. El-Affendi, 71.
- 42 *Al-Ra'i al-'Aam*, 2 September 1964.

- 43 Daly and Holt, 181.
- 44 Ahmad Muhammad Shamouq, *October al-Thawra al-Zafira* (Khartoum: Ha'ai al-Khartoum li'l-Sahafa wa Nushr, 3rd edn, 2008), 154–5. Salah el Din El Tayeb, *Students' Movement in Sudan, 1940–1970* (Khartoum: Khartoum University Press, 1970), 46.
- 45 Shamouq, 78.
- 46 Shamouq, 79.
- 47 Abdullahi Ali Ibrahim, Interview with al-Tahir Hasan al-Tom, *Sanawat fi Dahaliz al-Hizb al-Shiyyi* (Khartoum: Sharika al-Dinuna li'l-Sahafa wa'l Nushr wa'l I'alaam, 2011), 71.
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- 51 Muhammad Salih Umar, Interview with *al-Sahafa*, 5 December 2011. Ahmad Ali Baggadi, 'Fi Nadwa al-Janub fi Jaami'a al-Qahira Fara'a al-Khartoum', *al-Ra'i al-'Aam*, 27 September 1964.
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- 53 Ahmad Muhammad Shamouq, *October al-Thawra al-Zafira* (Khartoum: Ha'ai al-Khartoum li'l-Sahafa wa Nushr, 3rd edn, 2008), 154–5, 84–5.
- 54 Shamouq, 86–7. Abd al-Muni'im Abd al-Qadir Abd al-Majid, 'al-Dhikra 47 li-thawra October', *al-Sahafa*, 21 October 2011.
- 55 Shamouq, 88–92.
- 56 Shamouq, 95–100. El-Affendi, 71.
- 57 Shamouq, 112–6.
- 58 Shamouq, 154–5.
- 59 Rabie Hasan Ahmad's interview with al-Tahir al-Tom, 19 October 2012, *tahertom.net*, [http://www.tahertom.net/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=211:-21-1964-1964-12-2012-&catid=3:2010-07-07-12-05-53&Itemid=7](http://www.tahertom.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=211:-21-1964-1964-12-2012-&catid=3:2010-07-07-12-05-53&Itemid=7) (viewed 28 October 2012)
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- 61 Kraminick, 37–8.
- 62 Baggadi, 'Thawra'.
- 63 See Chapter 3.
- 64 Abd al-Wahhab Ibrahim, *Awraq min Dhakira* (Khartoum: Sharika Mataabi'a al-Sudan li'l-'umla al-mahdouda, 2007), 115.
- 65 *Al-Sahafa*, 5 December 2011.
- 66 Shamouq, 136–7. *al-Sahafa*, 5 December 1964. Abdullahi Ali Ibrahim, 'Ahmad al-Qurayshi Taha', *Sudanile*, 21 October 2007, <http://www.sudanile.com/sudanile29.html> Abdullah Alaqam estimates that 700 students were present. See Abdullah Alaqam, 'Hawamish ala daftar thawra Oktober', *al-Rakoba*, 23 October 2012.
- 67 Shamouq, 140.
- 68 Umar Interview, *al-Ittihadi*. Anwar Nur al-Hadi, who organized the seminar, supports this, arguing that there was no direct plan to topple the regime and that the students were just seeking 'any chance to talk about politics'. Anwar Nur al-Hadi, Interview with *Sudan.Net*, October 2009, <http://www.sudanforum.net/showthread.php?t=73582> (accessed 29 October 2012).



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- 71 Interview 1.
- 72 Shamouq, 144.
- 73 Shamouq, 158.
- 74 Shamouq, 172–4, 177.
- 75 Shamouq, 174. Ahmad Interview (2/3), *Akhir Lahza*.
- 76 Shamouq, 177.
- 77 Niblock, 225–8.
- 78 Shamouq, 179.
- 79 Interview 16.
- 80 Scott to FO, 24 October 1965, FO371/178810, TNA.
- 81 Interview 40.
- 82 Mustafa Mubarak, 'Al-idrab siyasi al-aam wa kaifa bada', *Al-Ra'i al-'Aam*, 10 November 2011.
- 83 Woodward, *Unstable State*, 108–9. Daly and Holt, 155. Fadl Hasan, 507. Niblock, 225–8.
- 84 Bechtold, 211–3.
- 85 Interview 18.
- 86 Hasan al-Turabi, Interview in *al-Sahafa*, 22 October 2011.
- 87 Muhammad al-Hasan, 'Yawmiyyat Mihniyya min wa 'an thawra October 1964', *Al-Ra'i al-'Aam*, 23 October 2011.
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- 89 *Sudan al-Jadid*, 30 October 1964. Ahmad al-Amin Abd al-Rahman, *Ashwaq bi la Marfa'* (Khartoum: s.n., 2006), 74.
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- 92 Kraminick, 34.
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- 97 Abd al-Rahman, *Ashwaq*, 74.
- 98 Shawgi Mallasi, *Awraq Sudaniyya* (Dar al-Izza li'l-Nushr wa'l-Tawzi', Khartoum: s.n., 2004).
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- 103 Scott to Walker, November 1964, FO371/178810, TNA.
- 104 *Al-Ra'i al-'Aam*, 14 November 1964.
- 105 'Khartoum Situation "serious" in 4 days of anti-U.S. riots', *Herald Tribune*, 26 October 1964, found in Scott to Walker, 25 October 1964, FO371/178810.
- 106 *Herald Tribune*, 26 October 1964.
- 107 Interview 20.
- 108 Interview 18.

- 109 Interview 20. SCP Central Committee Meeting, 4 November 1964, Sudan Communist Party Egyptian Branch Collection, IISH 8.
- 110 SCP Central Committee Meeting, 4 November 1964, IISH 8.
- 111 Muhammad Abu al-Qasim Hajj Hamad, *al-Sudan: al-Ma'zaq al-Tarikhi wa Afaq al-Mustaqbal*, Vol. 2 (Beirut: Dar Ibn al-Hazm, 1996), 268. Ian Scott to Foreign Office, 25 October 1964, FO371/178810. *al-Sudan al-Jadid*, 4 November 1964.
- 112 Ian Scott to Foreign Office, 25 October 1964, FO371/178810, TNA.
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- 120 Shamouq, 188. Interview 41.
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- 123 Interview 41.
- 124 Eltayeb, *The Students' Movement*, 43. Interview 35.
- 125 Mahgub Bireir, *Mawaqif 'ala Darab al-Zaman (Volume 1)* (Khartoum: Sharika mataabi' al-Sudan li'l-umla, 2002), 559.
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- 127 Bireir, 561.
- 128 Interview 15.
- 129 Muhammad Mahgub, *Democracy on Trial* (London: Deutsch, 1974). Interview 22. Zein al-Abdin Abd al-Qadir himself admits that it was his regiment that opened fire, but claims he gave no order and that a group of soldiers opened fire spontaneously on a batch of protesters who had ignored warnings to stop advancing towards their position. See Kamal Khasm al-Mus, interview with Ibrahim al-Nur Siwar al-Dahab, c. December 1996, reported in *al-Hadag*, October 2008, <http://www.alhadag.com/reports1.php?id=672> (accessed on 17 June 2012).
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- 133 Interview 35.
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- 146 Ibrahim, 'Theology'.
- 147 Al-Turabi, 'Dhikri'.
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- 149 Jafa'ar Shaikh Idris, 'al-qim allati asha'alat al-thawra', *al-Mithaq al-Islami*, 24 October 1965.
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- 152 Esposito and Voll, 123.
- 153 Abdullahi A. Gallab, *First Islamist Republic* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 57.
- 154 Gallab, *Republic*, 58.
- 155 *Al-Sahafa*, 25 October 1964.
- 156 Gallab, *Republic*, 58.
- 157 Gallab, *Republic*, 58.
- 158 Interview 6.
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- 160 Gallab, *Republic*, 57.
- 161 *Al-Ra'i al-'Aam*, 7 November 1964.
- 162 Mahgub, *Democracy*, 192.
- 163 Muhammad Shaikh al-Arab, 'Limadha nala'q al-khaiba ya October 1964', *al-Watan*, 21 October 2011, <http://www.alwatansudan.com/index.php?type=3&id=28154&bk=1>.
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- 170 Muhammad Abd al-Hayy, Interview, *al-Siyasa*, 21 October 1986.
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- 175 *Sudan al-Jadid*, 29 October 1964.
- 176 Mahmoud A. Suleiman, 'Celebrate the 48th Anniversary of Sudan's Glorious October 1964 Revolution', *Sudan Tribune*, 22 October 2012, <http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article44274>.
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- 178 Shamouq, 153.



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- 181 Al-Bedawi, 'al-marra'.
- 182 Stephanie Cronin, 'Introduction,' in Stephanie Cronin (ed.), *Subalterns and Social Protest: History from Below in the Middle East and North Africa* (London: Routledge, 2011), 7.
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- 184 Mallasi, 76.
- 185 Al-Turabi Interview, *al-Sahafa*.
- 186 Interview 16.
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- 188 Abd al-Hamid al-Fadl, 'Yawmiyyat Mushahid...' ala thawra October', *al-Sahafa*, 16 October 2011.
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- 190 *Al-Ra'i al-'Aam*, 25 November 1964.
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- 195 *Al-Ra'i al-'Aam*, 22 November 1964.
- 196 *Al-Ra'i al-'Aam*, 22 November 1964, 25 November 1964. *Al-Kurdufan*, 2 November 1964.
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- 199 *Al-Kurdufan*, 2 November 1964.
- 200 *Al-Kurdufan*, 27 October 1964, 2 November 1964. *Al-Ra'i al-'Aam*, 14 November 1964.
- 201 *Al-Sudan al-Jadid*, 2 November 1964.
- 202 *Al-Ra'i al-'Aam*, 22 November 1964.
- 203 *Al-Ra'i al-'Aam*, 25 November 1964.
- 204 Interview 28.
- 205 Interview 6, Interview 33.
- 206 Interview 33.
- 207 *Al-Ahdath*, 7 October 2011. *al-Ra'i al-'Aam*, 7 November 1964, 17 November 1964, 25 November 1964. For Shakir Siraj's position on the Central Committee, see 'Ma'lumat 'an al-ittihad', Sudan Doctors Union Website, <http://sudandoctorsunion.net/ar/MainContents.php?page=about> (accessed on 5 May 2012)
- 208 *Al-Ra'i al-'Aam*, 14 November 1964.
- 209 Ibrahim, *Al-Wazir*, 63. Thomson, 28.
- 210 Mahgub Abd al-Rahman al-Zein, *Ma'alim fi al-Tatawwur al-Siyasi wa'l-Ijtima'i wa'l-Idari wa'l-Armi fi Tarikh Dar Fur al-Mu'asir 1916–1989* (Khartoum: s.n., 2012), 56.
- 211 Al-Zein, 52.
- 212 Mukhtar Mohammad Ali Nur al Deen, *Ethnicity and Politics in Northern Sudan with Special Reference to Beja and the Nuba* (Master's Thesis, University of Khartoum, 1982), 129, 216.

## Chapter 2

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- 2 For a discussion of patron-client networks in post-colonial African Regimes, see Alexander Thomson, *An Introduction to African Politics* (London: Routledge, 2000), 111–12.
- 3 M. W. Daly and P. M. Holt, *A History of the Sudan* (London: Longman, 2000), 187.
- 4 Daly and Holt, 189–92.
- 5 Daly and Holt, 189–90.
- 6 Alain Gresh, 'The Free Officers and The Comrades: The Sudanese Communist Party and Nimeiri Face to Face, 1969–1971', *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 21 (1989): 396.
- 7 Gresh, 396.
- 8 Gresh, 396.
- 9 Gresh, 396.
- 10 Daly and Holt, 195.
- 11 Daly and Holt, 195.
- 12 Gresh, 394.
- 13 Mansour Khalid, *Nimeiri and the Revolution of Dis-May* (London: KPI, 1985), 12.
- 14 Khalid, Nimeiri, 12. Daly and Holt, 196. Farouk Abu Eissa, one of the Front's two secretaries, was a minister between 1969 and 1971. He stayed with the government after its initial rift with the Sudan Communist Party, but left in protest against the arbitrary nature of the trials that led to the deaths of Abd al-Khaliq Mahgub and Shafi' Ahmad al-Shaikh in 1971. See comments by Taj al-Sirr Abdullah on *Sudaneseonline*, 'Bi-munasiba dhikra thawra al-Oktober: al-Munadil Farouk Abu Eissa bi-la Hudud', 14 November 2005, <http://www.sudaneseonline.com/cgi-bin/sdb/2bb.cgi?seq=msg&board=13&msg=1189109816&func=previous> (accessed 3 November 2012)
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- 16 Johnson, 39.
- 17 Justin Willis and Alta el-Battahani, 'We changed the laws: electoral practice and malpractice in Sudan since 1953', *African Affairs* 109 (2010): 208.
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- 20 Gresh, 405.
- 21 Gresh, 405.
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- 26 Daly and Holt, 210.
- 27 Tim Niblock, 'The background to the change of government in 1985', in Woodward (ed.), *Sudan after Nimeiri* (London: Routledge, 1991), 40.
- 28 Khalid, *Nimeiri*, 71–3.
- 29 Khalid, *Nimeiri*, 93–4, 134–5, 162–3.
- 30 Daly and Holt, 213.

- 31 Khalid, *Nimeiri*, 250. Daly and Holt, 212.
- 32 Daly and Holt, 212.
- 33 Daly and Holt, 212.
- 34 Ann Mosley Lesch, *The Sudan* (Oxford: James Currey 1998), 52–3.
- 35 Lesch, 52–3.
- 36 Lesch, 62.
- 37 Interview 25.
- 38 Lesch, 62.
- 39 Interview 12.
- 40 Tijani al-Hussain, *al-Falḥ* (Khartoum: s.n., 1985), 5–6.
- 41 *Al-Ayyam*, 12 April 1985.
- 42 Ayubi, 411.
- 43 *Al-Sahafa*, 25 March 1985.
- 44 Abu Rannat and Abd al-Aziz, 307. Ali Shummo's links to the ICF/NIF are noted in J. Millard Burr and Robert O. Collins, *Revolutionary Sudan* (Brill: Leiden, 2003), 11.
- 45 Daly and Holt, 195–208.
- 46 Khalid, *Nimeiri*, 212.
- 47 Gayle Smith, 'George Bush in Khartoum', MERIP Reports No. 135: 25–6.
- 48 Khalid, *Nimeiri*, 212. Muhammad Sa'id Qalandar, *Sanawat al-Numayri* (Khartoum: 'Abd al-Karim al-Mirghani al-Thaqafi, 2005), 404–5.
- 49 'Visit of the Lord Privy Seal to the Sudan: 8–10 December 1980', FCO 93/2533, TNA.
- 50 Khalid, *Nimeiri*, 213. Qalandar, *Sanawat*, 404–5.
- 51 Interview 8.
- 52 Abu Rannat and Abd al-Aziz, 80.
- 53 Abu Rannat and Abd al-Aziz, 80.
- 54 Khalid, *Nimeiri*, 195.
- 55 Khalid, *Nimeiri*, 197.
- 56 CD Powell to HEDC Carden, 13 December 1978, FCO 93/1633, TNA.
- 57 Khalid, *Nimeiri*, 227.
- 58 Khalid, *Nimeiri*, 227–9.
- 59 Zein al-Abdin 'Abd al-Qadir, *Mayo: Sanawat al-Khasb wa'l-Jafaf* (Khartoum: Markaz Muhammad Umar Bashir li'l-Dirasat al-Sudaniyya, 2011).
- 60 Mr William A Pierce Interview, 29 January 2001, available online at the Foreign Affairs Oral History Collection (FOAHC) for the Association of Diplomatic Studies and Training, [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/D?mfdip:2::/temp/~amnm\\_uk2z](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/D?mfdip:2::/temp/~amnm_uk2z) (accessed on Wednesday 11 April 2012).
- 61 Khalid, *Nimeiri*, 193.
- 62 See Chapter 5.
- 63 Khalid, *Nimeiri*, 241.
- 64 For more details, see Chapter 5.
- 65 Abu Rannat and Abd al-Aziz, 80. Another senior May Regime official, Muzammil Ghandur, makes a similar claim – see Muzammil Sulayman Ghandur, *Ma Ba'ad Ayyam Zanani* (Khartoum: Dar al-'Izza li'l-Nushr wa'l-Tawzi', 2010), 74.
- 66 Johnson, 53–4.
- 67 Johnson, 53–4.
- 68 Abdelwahab el-Affendi, *Turabi's Revolution* (London: Grey Seal, 1991), 115.
- 69 El-Affendi, 126. Qalandar, *Sanawat*, 432.
- 70 Interview 16.
- 71 Khalid, *Nimeiri*, 277–9. Abd al-Qadir, 121.



- 72 Aharon Layish and Gabriel Warburg, *The Re-Instatement of Islamic Law under Numeiri* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 214–5, 235–43.
- 73 Lesch, 54–6. Layish and Warburg, *Re-Instatement*, 77–8.
- 74 Ibrahim, *Delirium*, 221–2.
- 75 Daly and Holt, 216. Abd al-Qadir, 171–2. Ibrahim bases his argument concerning Numeiri's knack for populism on a citation from Mansur Khalid, which is in fact more relevant to the earlier period of Numeiri's presidency – see Khalid, *Numeiri*, 12. However, with regard to Numeiri's application of the September Laws, Khalid writes 'For Islam the 1984 measures were counter-productive. They did not galvanize the pious Muslims behind Numeiri; on the contrary, Sudanese Muslims believe that these decisions defiled Islam'. Khalid, *Numeiri*, 271.
- 76 Khalid, *Numeiri*, 257.
- 77 Even Abdullahi Ali Ibrahim admits this – see Ibrahim, *Delirium*, 222.
- 78 C. William Kontos interview with Thomas Stern, 12 February 1992, FAOHC.
- 79 Fatih Osman, 'Sudan: much promise, some problems', *Arabia*, November 1984, 18–22, copy found in Allison Papers, SAD /15/36. For the establishment of these groups, see Layish and Warburg, *Re-Instatement*.
- 80 El-Affendi, 125. Ibrahim, *Delirium*, 222. These measures led Umar al-Tayyib to admit his discontent openly to a senior Umma Party member whom Numeiri had imprisoned for his opposition to *shari'a*. *Sawt al-Umma*, 22 December 1985.
- 81 Abu Rannat and Abd al-Aziz, 83.
- 82 El-Affendi, 125.
- 83 Qalandar, *Sanawat*, 453.
- 84 An English language copy of the pamphlet can be found on the Republican Brothers' website, *Alfikra.org*, [http://www.alfikra.org/article\\_page\\_view\\_e.php?article\\_id=1001&page\\_id=1](http://www.alfikra.org/article_page_view_e.php?article_id=1001&page_id=1) (accessed on 12 March 2012).
- 85 Daly and Holt, 216.
- 86 Abu Rannat and Abd al-Aziz, 111. Musa, Isma'il al-Hag Musa, *Fi Dahalizi al-Sulta: Mudhakirat lam taktamal* (Khartoum: Beit Khartoum li'l-tiba'a wa'l-nushr, 2000), 138. It could, of course, be argued that the former SSU and SSO men who penned these texts were trying to justify the role played by their respective institutions after the event. However, both of these books were penned after the Umar Bashir coup of 1989 brought the anti-Republican Brother NIF party into power, and as such there would be little political motive for this.
- 87 Khalid, *Numeiri*, 392.
- 88 Khalid, *Numeiri*, 393.
- 89 Interview 9.
- 90 Khalid, *Numeiri*, 394.
- 91 See Chapter 3.
- 92 Khalid, *Numeiri*, 393. Woodward, *Unstable State*, 170.
- 93 Johnson, 57. Khalid, *Numeiri*, 393. Woodward, *Unstable State*, 170.
- 94 Johnson, 57.
- 95 Smith, 'George Bush'.
- 96 Johnson, 58.
- 97 *The New Scientist*, 5 September 1985.
- 98 al-Hussain, *al-Faidan* (Khartoum, 1985), 28.
- 99 Smith, 'George Bush'. *al-Sahafa*, 10 October 1985.
- 100 Charles Kennedy interview with David Shinn, 5 July 2002, FOAHC.
- 101 *Al-Sahafa*, 29 October 1985.

- 102 Smith, 'George Bush' *al-Sahafa*, 29 October 1985.
- 103 El-Affendi, 128. Interview 16. Adlan Hardallo, group interview in al-Ashiqqa', 7 April 1987, cited Muhammad Hussein, *Marfa' al-Dhaakira al-Sudaniyya* (Khartoum: s.n., 2008), 178.
- 104 El-Affendi, 128.
- 105 Qalandar, *Sanawat*, 445–6.
- 106 Qalandar, *Sanawat*, 446–7.
- 107 Al-Hussein, *al-Faidan*, 6.
- 108 Al-Hussein, *al-Faidan*, 7.
- 109 Uthman Abdullah, Interview, *al-Sudani*, 10 April 2007 (2-2).
- 110 Pierce Interview, FOAHC.
- 111 *Al-Ra'i al-'Aam*, 6 April 2008.
- 112 Al-Hussein, *al-Faidan*, 35.
- 113 'One Party Rule Overthrown: At Last!', *Sudanow*, April 1985, 9–11. Even Zein al-Abdin Abd al-Qadir, a former senior SSU official, admits that it was a 'comedy' (*hazila*). Abd al-Qadir, 176.
- 114 Isma'il al-Haj Musa, Interview, *al-Sahafa*, 27–29 April 2008, cited in Muhammad Hussein, *Marfa' al-Dhaakira al-Sudaniyya* (Khartoum: s.n., 2008), 144.
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- 121 Interview 39. Siwar al-Dahab observes that he heard rumours that Umar al-Tayyib was about to take over, but did not think such an eventuality would be likely because of his lack of support within the country. Interview 30.
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## Chapter 3

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- 19 Ahmad Muhammad Shamouq, *Oktober al-Thawra al-Zafira* (Khartoum: Ha'ai al-Khartoum li'l-Sahafa wa Nushr, 3rd edn, 2008), 179. A similar account is rendered by Abdullah Alaqam, 'Hawamish ala daftar thawra Oktober', who identifies both al-Turabi and Ali Muhammad Khair as the men who incited the students in this way.
- 20 Interview 16.
- 21 Shamouq, 179.
- 22 Interview 32.
- 23 Interview 8.
- 24 Abdullah Alaqam, 'Hawamish ala daftar thawra Oktober'.
- 25 Interview 8.
- 26 When the author made reference to these claims in his interview with al-Turabi, the latter responded by simply changing the subject and re-iterating standard Islamist claims about the reaction of the SCP to the Revolution. Interview 43. The fact that al-Turabi encouraged the crowds to disperse peacefully is acknowledged by El-Affendi, who at the time he published his book was one of his sympathizers. See el-Affendi, 71.
- 27 Shamouq, 180.
- 28 Yahya Muhammad Mahmoud al-Malik, 'Nadwa al-Arba'a 21 October 1964: Khawatir Musharik wa Shahid Ayyan', *Ray al-Sha'ab*, 25 October 2011. Interview 21.
- 29 See post by al-Taj al-Sirr Abdullah, 'Bi-Munasiba dhikra Thawra al-Oktober: al-Munadil Faruq Abu Issa bi-la hudud', <http://www.sudaneseonline.com/cgi-bin/sdb/2lbb.cgi?seq=msg&board=13&msg=1189109816&func=previous>, 29 October 2012.
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- 31 Interview 35.
- 32 El-Affendi, 70.
- 33 El-Affendi, 71. See Shamouq, 79–80 for details of the attendance of Muhammad Salih Umar and Ali Abdalla Yaqub at this particular seminar.
- 34 El-Affendi, 71.
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- 36 El-Affendi, 62.
- 37 El-Affendi, 64.
- 38 El-Affendi, 63.
- 39 Gallab, *Republic*, 53.
- 40 Rabie Hasan Ahmad, Interview; *al-Mithaq*, 20 October 1965. Shamouq, 149, 170. There were, of course, a number of non-Islamists involved in this protest – see Chapter 4.
- 41 Hamdi stayed with al-Bashir during Turabi's famous break with the latter in 1999, while Muhammad Salih Umar and Turabi became engaged in a particularly acrimonious dispute within the Muslim Brotherhood between 1966 and 1968. El-Affendi, 87, 106.

- 42 Shamouq, 178.
- 43 Interview 16.
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- 45 Rabie Hasan Ahmad interview with al-Tahir al-Tom, 19 October 2012, *tahertom.net*, [http://www.tahertom.net/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=211:-21-1964-1964-12-2012-&catid=3:2010-07-07-12-05-53&Itemid=7](http://www.tahertom.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=211:-21-1964-1964-12-2012-&catid=3:2010-07-07-12-05-53&Itemid=7) (viewed 28 October 2012).
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- 47 El-Affendi, 64.
- 48 See Chapter 6.
- 49 Interview 43.
- 50 Interview 43.
- 51 Interview 46.
- 52 *Al-Sahafa*, 23 October 2011.
- 53 Ismael, 31.
- 54 Muhammad Abu al-Qasim Hajj Hamad, *al-Sudan: al-Ma'zaq al-Tarikhi wa Afaq al-Mustaqbal*, Vol. 2 (Beirut: Dar Ibn al-Hazm, 1996), 273. Interview 7, Interview 16.
- 55 Hamad, 273.
- 56 Hamad, 273.
- 57 Muhammad Ahmad Mahgub, *Democracy on Trial* (London: Deutsch, 1974), 191. El-Affendi, who is a pro-ICF source, refers to this as only 'apparent collusion' and cites the SCP statement that its participation would work to 'deepen the crisis of the regime' without particularly criticizing it. El-Affendi, 70. Abdullahi Ali Ibrahim, 'Rabi' thawra October 1964: Abd al-Khaliq Mahgub Maestro al-Taktik', *SudaneseOnline*, 10 October 2009, <http://www.sudaneseonline.com/cgi-bin/sdb/2bh.cgi?seq=msg&board=350&msg=1318008576> (accessed 29 June 2012). al-Tayyib Zain al-Abdin, 'Thawra 1964m man sana'aha?', *al-Intibaha*, 21 October 2011, [http://alintibaha.net/portal/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=4269:-1964-&Itemid=507](http://alintibaha.net/portal/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=4269:-1964-&Itemid=507) (accessed 4 July 2012).
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- 60 Sulayman, *Siyasa Fikr wa Jawlat*, 269–70.
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- 69 *Thawrat al-Sha'ab*, 438.
- 70 *Thawrat al-Sha'ab*, 434.
- 71 Fadl Hasan, 501.
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- 79 Warburg, *Islam*, 114.
- 80 Interview 32.
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- 82 Abd al-Rahman, *Ashwaq*, 83.
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- 88 Abdullahi Ali Ibrahim, 'Thawra October 1964 Sudaniyya ... lamma yatill fi fajrna zaalim', *al-Ra'i al-Sha'ab*, 25 October 2011.
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- 98 Mallasi, 70–1.
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- 52 Ghandur, 126.
- 53 Ghandur, 126.
- 54 Bireir, 524–5.
- 55 Bireir, 527.
- 56 Bireir, 529.
- 57 Qalandar, *Abboud*, 201–2.
- 58 Bireir, 547.
- 59 Bireir, 547.
- 60 Mallasi, 76.
- 61 Interview 18.
- 62 Mallasi, 81.
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- 64 Mallasi, 81.
- 65 Interview 10.
- 66 Zein al-Abdin Muhammad Ahmad 'Abd al-Qadir, *Mayo: Sanawat al-Khash wa'l Jafaf* (Khartoum: Markaz Muhammad Umar Bashir li'l-Dirasat al-Sudaniyya, 2011), 3.
- 67 For Muhammad Irwa's Khatmi background, see Interview 22. For the rest, see Holt and Daly, 75.
- 68 Interview 22. While the author is relying on Mahjub Irwa – who no doubt wishes to present his relative in a positive light and to disassociate him from the acts of a regime now discredited for this account – it would explain why the KUSU executive committee were, to their own surprise, detained one day after submitting the memorandum rather than immediately – Interview 41. Moreover, it is well known that during the early days of the Revolution, Irwa was in Kassala (see Thomson, 16), which, given the intensity of the political situation at the time, would seem strange were it not for the fact that, as Mahjub Irwa claims, he had fallen out with his SCAF comrades and resigned his post.
- 69 Al-Sadiq al-Mahdi, Interview, *Akhir Lahza*, 22 October 2012, [http://www.akhirilahza.sd/akhir/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=21832:-l21r-l2r&catid=38&deilogs&Itemid=116](http://www.akhirilahza.sd/akhir/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=21832:-l21r-l2r&catid=38&deilogs&Itemid=116) (accessed 23 October 2012).
- 70 Bireir, 549.
- 71 Bireir, 554.
- 72 *Al-Ra'i al-'Aam*, 23 October 2011.
- 73 'Shakhsiyyat Askariyya', RSMNDW.
- 74 Thomson, 20.
- 75 Thomson, 20.
- 76 Qalandar, *Abboud*, 203.
- 77 Interview 29. Rabie Hasan Ahmad, Interview (3/3), *Akhir Lahza*, 23 October 2011. Thomson, 20.
- 78 Bireir, 554.
- 79 Thomson, 17.

- 80 'Shakhsiyyat Askariyya', RSMNDW. Gallab, *Republic*, 70.
- 81 See Qalandar, 134 for details of the expulsions.
- 82 See Chapter 6.
- 83 Abd al-Rahman, *Ashwaq*. Jafar Karrar Interview, *al-Sahafa*, 21 October 1999.
- 84 Karrar Interview, *al-Sahafa*.
- 85 Interview 22. Bireir, 556. Muzammil Ghandur admits that he, at one stage, approached Hasan Bashir Nasr and suggested that he take over from Abboud, although he also claims that Muhammad Al-Baghir Ahmad, Muhammad Idris Abdullah and al-Tayyib al-Mardi supported him in this. Ghandur, 126.
- 86 Interview 48.
- 87 Bireir, 558. Hasan al-Turabi, Interview, *al-Sahafa*, 5 December 1964.
- 88 Al-Turabi Interview, *al-Sahafa*.
- 89 Thomson, 28.
- 90 Bireir, 270.
- 91 Interview 10. Bireir, 560.
- 92 Bireir, 560.
- 93 Bireir, 560. Qalandar, *Abboud*, 207.
- 94 See Chapter 6.
- 95 'Shakhsiyyat Askariyya', RSMNDW. See Shamouq, 31 for details of Khawwad's departure from the November Regime.
- 96 'Shakhsiyyat Askariyya', RSMNDW.
- 97 Mustafa, 'Tanzim'.
- 98 Mustafa, 'Tanzim'.
- 99 *Al-Midan* February 1979.
- 100 Ibrahim, *Awraq*, 57.
- 101 Ibrahim, Abu Humayd Ahmad, *Qissat Kifah wa Najah* (Khartoum: Dar al-Izza li-Nushr wa'l Tawzia, 2007), 230.
- 102 Qalandar, *Sanawat*, 449.
- 103 Qalandar, *Sanawat*, 399.
- 104 Interview with Hussein al-Hindi, *al-Destour*, 8–14 November 1980.
- 105 D. Glazebrook (Defence Attaché) to R. A. Fyjis Walker, 9 March 1980, FCO 93/2535, TNA.
- 106 Yousif Hussein, Interview with al-Fatih Abbas, *al-Sudani*, 9 April 2006.
- 107 Isam al-Mirghani, *al-Jaysh al-Sudani fi Siyasa* (Cairo: Afro wa Naji li-tasmiya wa'l-tiba'a, 2002), 141.
- 108 Ann Mosley Lesch, *The Sudan* (Oxford: James Currey, 1998), 53. Al-Mirghani, 141. Abbas Madani, interview with Muhammad Abd al-Qadir and Mujahid Bashir, *Al-Ra'i al-'Aam*, 5 April 2011.
- 109 Sirr Ahmed Sa'id, *al-Saif wa'l Tugha* (Cairo (?): Sharika 'Aalamiyya li'l-tiba'a wa'l Nushr, 2001), 97. Khalid, *Nimeiri*, 218.
- 110 Unsigned correspondence dated 18 December 1980, 'Visit of the Lord Privy Seal to the Sudan: 8–10 December 1980', FCO 93/2533.
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- 113 Lesch, *Sudan*, 53. Madani Interview, *Al-Ra'i al-'Aam*.
- 114 Sa'id, *al-Saif*, 99. Interview 22.
- 115 Mustafa al-Bakri, *Qissat al-Thawra fi Sudan* (Cairo: Dar al-Imad, 1985), 23.
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- 117 *Al-Ayyam*, 12 April 1985. *Al-Sahafa*, 9 April 1985.

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- 122 *The Times*, 7 January 1985.
- 123 Interview 6.
- 124 Abdelwahab el-Affendi, *Turabi's Revolution* (London: Grey Seal, 1991), 124.
- 125 Abd al-Majid Aleish, *Yawmiyyat al-Dawla al-Islamiyya* (Khartoum: Dar al-Izza li'l-Nushr wa'l Tawzia, 2005), 68.
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- 129 Al-Mirghani, 230–1.
- 130 Yasin Umar Imam interview with Abd al-Rahim Muhieddin, cited in Muhieddin, *al-Turabi*, 177.
- 131 Al-Mirghani, 236–7.
- 132 Al-Mirghani, 238.
- 133 Al-Mirghani, 238. Sa'id, 97.
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- 135 Al-Mirghani, 154. Abu Rannat and Abd al-Aziz, 102.
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- 139 Al-Mirghani, 151–2.
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## Chapter 6

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